

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

RATIONAL DESIRE AND ORGANIC HOLISM OF JUSTIFICATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2018

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*For my parents,
Uri and Erel Amit*

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Acknowledgments

In the characteristic pithiness of scriptural Hebrew, the Talmud teaches “*haposel bemumo posel*,” which literally translates to “the rejector rejects from his own defect.” Extreme pithiness demands interpretation, and this three-word idiom is often understood to mean something like: He who criticizes and rejects something as defective does so based on the same defect in him. Understood in this way, this phrase asks us to turn our gaze from the object of criticism to ourselves, and in doing so to transform the act of criticism into an exercise in self-understanding. This piece of Talmudic teaching is among the ethical maxims that figure in Jewish ethical habituation and, as such, it is almost universally known in Israel. Thus, by the time I began my undergraduate degree at Tel-Aviv University, I considered it to be a constituent of unreflective-everyday-ethical-life, which I wished to question, critique, and if needed, reject. The irony in rejecting “the rejector rejects from his own defect” did not strike me until my friend Ohad Reiss proposed an academic paraphrase: The scholar investigates from his own defect. This immediately caught on and turned into something of a party game in which we speculated on the psychological profiles of scholars based on their research; the methods and objects of their study became windows into their worries, wounds, unconscious aspirations, and innermost phantasies.

It didn’t take long for this game to backfire. It was hardly surprising that my work on the metaphysics of plants in my first years at the University of Chicago became a favorite topic at cocktails parties, to the point that for a short period I was known in some circles as the philosopher of cabbages. Being the butt of a joke had the benefit of spending many hours with friends and colleagues reflecting on my interest in vegetative life. What crystalized in this time was that what fascinated me in vegetative life was the clarity and objectivity of normativity in that realm, which is so absent in human life. What

is good for an oak tree is no mystery. It is determined by the system of life processes that constitute its species. This fascination disclosed my yearning for similar clarity and a sense of groundedness in human life, and especially in my own life. My secret hope was that if I could understand the normativity of plants and then carefully climb up the ladder of life, I might end up with an ethical theory that resembled, in its systematicity and lucidity, a system of natural historical judgments like that of an oak tree.

The idea that we can learn about ethics from the normativity of non-rational life did not come to me out of thin air. Quite the opposite. The intellectual atmosphere surrounding me during my first years at the University of Chicago was saturated with neo-Aristotelian ideas. My first-year seminar, which was taught by Candace Vogler, had an especially strong influence on me. It was there that I got to know the ethical works of John McDowell, Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot, whose mark can be traced throughout my dissertation. The introduction to neo-Aristotelian ethics is only my earliest debt to Candace, and by no means the greatest one.

Candace, who was my advisor, my PE adviser, and eventually my dissertation chair, has been a constant source of encouragement and guidance. She allowed my tendency for abstraction and systematization to expand and blossom, but also took good care to trim the wild branches once they threatened the vitality of the tree. Whenever my work spun into overly abstract territories, she reminded me not to lose sight of the goals of my research. It is thanks to such interventions that, by and by, I could move away from vegetables to concentrate on the question that truly troubled me—on what is valuable in human life. I owe to her guidance both my confidence to set out on intellectual adventures and the alertness not to be carried away into frictionless empty space. But perhaps more than anything else, I am grateful for the many fascinating conversations we have had that covered a vast intellectual and personal terrain, and made me feel at home, far away from home.

The home from which I was so far, is Israel, and especially my alma matter, Tel-Aviv University. It was there that I made my first steps in academia, and more importantly, where I became engrossed with philosophy. I was lucky to be a student of Eli Friedlander's, whose mentorship had a magical touch that inspired me and a group of enthusiastic students to spend (literally) days and nights in reading and contemplating works of German idealist and early analytic philosophy. It was by following Eli's advice that I decided to pursue the PhD studies at the university of Chicago. In retrospect, I cannot think of a better place to have studied, given my philosophical proclivities and interest.

But the transition from Tel-Aviv to Chicago did not occur without challenges, the greatest of which was to find my place in a language and a philosophical style that were foreign to me. An early turning point in this journey was the first time I read a paper by Anton Ford at the practical philosophy workshop. I can still remember very clearly my sense of discovery that complicated ideas could be conveyed so lucidly and convincingly, to the extent that, by the end of the paper, one could wonder how he had ever seen the world otherwise. This discovery marked a decisive moment in my understanding of what writing philosophy could be. With it dawned on me the realization that my writing had a very long road to travel, but one that I was (and still am) excited to follow. If, along the way, I needed any further motivation, all I had to do was to read a paper of Anton's, or to attend one of his presentations or classes.

It was in Anton's course on justice that I first saw the importance of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean and its relation to the unity of the virtues, but these themes became the backbone of my dissertation only after I got to know Anselm Müller's work on phronesis and holism in Aristotle's ethics. Through the many conversations I had with Anselm afterwards, I became convinced that valuable human ends must be understood as justified holistically by other valuable ends. I was also extremely lucky to have participated in three of Anselm's yearly workshops on practical philosophy.

To a very large extent, these workshops powerfully shaped my understanding of the field. Moreover, Anselm's deep and intimate understanding of the history of philosophy, along with his capacity to bring that history into conversation with contemporary philosophy, has become a model of philosophizing that I hope to emulate in my own work.

It was this capacity to bridge over millennia of philosophizing and to see them as one enterprise that also drew me to Agnes Callard's classes. Her teaching inspired me to study Aristotle much more closely than I had before, and to appreciate the extent to which his work could help with contemporary debates in ethics and, especially, with moral psychology. Agnes's teaching, as well as her office hour meetings, were eye opening in more than one respect. First and foremost, they established a new standard of rigor of argument; as my adviser, she constantly encouraged me to meet this standard (as much as I could). Rather than this pursuit of argumentative rigor feeling severe or harsh, working with Agnes was lit with a sense of discovery and curiosity ignited by her contagious philosophical zeal. So much so that I came to know in advance that after a meeting or a class I would be endowed with (or burdened by?) a new philosophical mystery to contemplate. Nowhere was this more present than when I was her TA in an intensive course on Plato, in which my main role was to keep the undergraduates' flame of enthusiasm at sustainable heights. Finally, Agnes has been an extremely generous adviser, always willing to meet and to read new materials. Her input has been both constructive and instructive; and on more than one occasion it has steered me away from currents whose destructive forces I came to appreciate only later.

I was an admirer of Matthias Haase's work years before he joined our philosophy department and so was understandingly thrilled to have him on my committee. My delight only increased when I discovered how thoughtful and kind he is as a person and mentor. Matthias's advice helped me enormously to improve the conceptual clarity and systematicity of my ideas; and to the extent that my dissertation manifests these intellectual virtues, I'm very much indebted to him. Discussing my work

with Matthias resembled being elevated to a higher vantage point, from which the whole and its holes became perspicuous. What was most incredible about this experience is that each time I imagined myself to have reached the full grasp of my project, the experience of elevation repeated and revealed new challenges and opportunities. I can only hope that these elevating conversations will continue after receiving my PhD.

No description of my PhD studies could ever be remotely adequate without mentioning Irad Kimhi. Not only have I attended no less than eight of Irad's classes over the years, and celebrated at least as many memorable Jewish holidays with him in what we have called "Irad's Tradition;" and, not only have I absorbed innumerable, brilliant insights and penetrating observations lavished upon me; most of all, my philosophical life has revolved around Irad's original philosophy, which, I can allow myself to say, after many years of study, is nothing less than groundbreaking. I am extremely thankful for the unique opportunity I have had to learn from him.

I am very lucky to have had additional fantastic teachers at the University of Chicago. I owe my understanding of early analytic philosophy (especially Wittgenstein) to Jim Conant, who, together with Robert Pippin, also shaped my knowledge of German idealism. I also must thank Jim especially for being an invigorating and supportive mentor, as well as a constant source of good humor and good stories. He has gone out of his way to widen my experience of philosophical life both intellectually and geographically, and to him I am very grateful. Furthermore, I owe my interest in utilitarianism and its origins in the thought of Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick, to Martha Nussbaum. Through her guidance both in class and in very generous conversations, I have come to appreciate the inseparability of utilitarianism (but more generally, any ethical theory) and the cultural-historical background in which it has first emerged. Father Stephen Brock, aside from being a wonderful partner in conversation, has also shown me the way into the philosophy of Aquinas (after many years in which I postponed my engagement with Aquinas despite repeating exhortations from Candace and Anselm).

There are many graduate students to whom I owe thanks. First, I would like to thank to a number of students with whom I have had especially close philosophical and intellectual exchanges: Pascal Brixel, Rory O’Connell and Anastasia Berg. I am also grateful to the many wonderful friends—philosophical and otherwise—I have made along the way: Nir Ben Moshe, Gilad Nir, Nadav Arviv, Claire Kirwin, Sara Lea Ben Asher, Mathis Koschel, Nethanel Lipshitz, Andrew Pitel, Santiago Mejia, Tuomo Tuisala, Roger Eichorn and Avner Steinmetz.

Writing a dissertation on what is valuable in human life, I could not but be grateful for the wonderful teachers and friends I have had in Chicago. But finally, I would not have been able to complete this work without the loving support of my parents, Uri and Erela (to whom this work is dedicated), and my four siblings, Noam, Yair, Avner and Asaf, who made conventional and unconventional uses of modern technology to make me feel warmly surrounded by their care. The last year was blessed by the loving presence of my partner, Abigail Marcus, who, among many other things, made the final throes of my dissertation sweet.

Introduction

It is a striking feature of human experience that we do not always value the ends we pursue. Thus, we do not value ends we pursue compulsively, or on a whim; nor do we value those we pursue akratically—that is, against our better judgment. Even more jarring are cases in which we persist in the pursuit of ends we no longer value but that were once vital and integral parts of our lives, like old hobbies, or old friendships that have ossified into rigid, lifeless routines. What is striking is that in these cases we find ourselves motivated to pursue ends *despite not valuing them*. Thus, though I do not value smoking cigarettes (indeed, I do not even take pleasure in smoking), I may find myself motivated to buy a pack. I am motivated not because I see any *justification* for buying cigarettes—since I do not value smoking at all—but rather, my motivation stems from a mere psychological cause, i.e., a *mere desire*. When I act on my *mere desire* to smoke cigarettes I am not acting on a *justification* but rather on a merely *motivating reason*.¹ By contrast, when an agent pursues ends she values, she acts on justifications. Thus, spending the holiday with my parents is *justified* because I value my family.

My dissertation asks what makes some ends valuable and others merely desired.² More specifically, it asks what makes an end valuable from the *agential viewpoint*, that is, what makes it *subjectively* valuable.³ An end is valuable, in this sense, if it is a source of justification *for the agent* rather than a merely motivating end. Throughout my dissertation I will call whatever

¹ By justification I mean what is often called in contemporary ethics justifying or normative reason. For the distinction between motivating reason and justification see E. J. Bond *Reason and value* (CUP Archive, 1983) and Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1994).

² Throughout my dissertation my interest shall be in the value intrinsic to ends rather than the value ends may have merely by furthering other ends. I shall return to this point later in the introduction.

³ Throughout the dissertation I will use the phrase “valuable ends” in the above specified sense. Namely, as ends that the agent values, rather than as ends that are valuable in some agent-independent sense.

renders ends valuable *ethical justification*.⁴ Accounting for ethical justification will be a central task of my project. My account emerges out of a critique of the five traditions of accounting for ethical justification: (1) The *psychologistic* tradition holds that ends are valuable by virtue of psychological properties and facts, like the pleasure associated with them, or the strength and constancy in which they are desired. Today this tradition is championed by neo-Humeans. (2) According to the *essentialist* tradition, ends are valuable if they are essential for the kind of being to which the agent belongs, or if they arise from, or conform to, principles that are constitutive of this kind of being. Neo-Aristotelians who ground ethical justification in human nature⁵ belong to this tradition. (3) *Existentialists* account for ethical justification by postulating a faculty of pure (existential) choice. Accordingly, an end is valuable if the agent is (purely) choosing it. Such existentialistic elements are found in the views advanced by a number of contemporary thinkers, like Harry Frankfurt and Christine Korsgaard.⁶ (4) The *rationalistic* tradition maintains that ethical justification consists in *reason*. In this light, ends are valuable if they are rational (e.g., they cohere with other ends, or justified by pure reason). Present day neo-Kantians uphold this tradition. Finally, (5) according to the *intuitionist* tradition, ends are ethically justified by virtue of a special faculty of value-intuition; that is, the agent values an end because she intuits that it is valuable.

⁴ It is crucial to stress the distinction between ethical and evaluative justifications. ‘Evaluative justification’ refers to any justification that renders contents (i.e., ends and means) valuable. By ‘ethical justification’ I refer specifically to evaluative justification that renders ends valuable in themselves, rather than valuable merely by virtue of other valuable ends. Justification is “merely evaluative” when it renders contents valuable merely by virtue of other ends, as in the case of means that are valuable *only* instrumentally, namely, by virtue of furthering a valuable end.

⁵ Philippa Foot’s *Natural Goodness* is an influential contemporary statement of this view. See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Clarendon Press, 2003).

⁶ This claim may seem downright false since both thinkers are strongly associated with other traditions; Korsgaard is a leading neo-Kantian and Frankfurt is a prominent neo-Humean. However, a close examination of their work (which I will provide in the first two chapters) discloses the existentialist aspect of their view.

My own account of ethical justification, which I call *organic holism*, emerges from my critique of these existing traditions, and to a great extent it is a synthesis of the psychologistic, essentialist, and rationalistic traditions. Valuable ends, I argue, are desired ends that are *organically* formed; in other words, what *ethically justifies* ends is that they are organically formed. That a desired end is organically formed means, roughly, two things: First, that it is justified by the agent's whole of mutually supporting desired ends (namely, an organic whole). Thus, on my account, if I value community life, it means that community life is justified by other *organically* justified desired ends (e.g., the well-being of my family and friends) that are furthered and sustained by my communal engagements. Second, organic justifications also *determine* the very content of valuable ends. Thus, it is not only that, for me, community life is organically justified,⁷ but that its justifications also determine what a valuable community *is* for me. Namely, it is the kind of community that supports and furthers the well-being of its members and their filial relationships.

Before I turn to outline the argument of the dissertation, I wish to further motivate and explicate the need to account for ethical justification. A skeptic might question the very distinction between valuable ends and merely desired ends, contending that *every* desired end, as such, is somewhat valued by the agent. In other words, desiring an end is sufficient grounds for valuing it. But, if, as the skeptic claims, every desired end is valued, there is no need to account for justification that distinguishes between valuable and merely desired ends, that is, for ethical justification. My first chapter will provide a principled response to this skeptic claim in arguing that valuing an end consists in identifying with it, and that desires do not secure identification. For now, though, I will confine my response to a few illustrations.

⁷ Namely, it is justified by other of my organically formed desired ends (e.g., the well-being of my family and friends).

Bizire scenarios: Works on practical justifications and values feature a multitude of scenarios involving bizarre desires, or as I shall call them here—bizires.⁸ These scenarios share a form: a protagonist⁹ who pursues a bizarre desire—a bizire—is usually interrogated, to reveal that, even from her perspective, her actions are wholly pointless. In other words, even she sees no justification to act in the way she is moved to act; even she sees no value in the end she pursues. Consider Warren Quinn’s famous radioman:

*We encounter radioman as he’s going around and turning on every radio in his vicinity. We learn that given the perception that a radio in his vicinity is turned off, he tries, other things being equal, to turn it on. He does not turn the radios on in order to bear music or get news. It is not that he has an inordinate appetite for entertainment or information. Indeed, he does not turn the radios on in order to bear anything; and not for the sake of any further end.*¹⁰

The absurdity of the bizire scenarios brings out a fundamental feature of practical reasoning. Namely, that it is absurd to act on an end in which one sees no value. In general, the lesson philosophers derive from bizire scenarios is that, in non-deficient cases, agents act on what they conceive of as justifications. Put differently, the lesson is that one must conceive of the end of one’s (non-deficient) action as *valuable*. While there seems to be an agreement about this conclusion, there is a debate concerning what it entails. Indeed, this conclusion is the source of two opposite approaches taken toward moral psychology, or better, value

⁸ Note the difference between “bizire” and its homophone “besire”: While the latter is commonly used to denote a unity of desire and belief (a unitary state), “bizire” is a neologism of my own making whose meaning shall become clearer below. For definitions of besire see, Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 119 and Nick Zangwill “Besires and the motivation debate.” *Theoria* 74, no. 1 (2008): 51.

⁹ Long standing favorites are Warren Quinn’s radioman, Anscombe’s mud lover, Joseph Raz’s wall-licker, Parfit’s future-Thursday-indifferent-person and Rawls’ grass-counter. Warren Quinn “Putting Rationality in its Place.” in *Morality and Action*. Edited by Philippa Foot and Warren Quin. (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 236. G. E. M Anscombe. *Intention*. 2nd edition. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), Joseph Raz “When we are Ourselves” in *Engaging reason: On the theory of value and action*. OUP Oxford, 2000, 21), Derek Parfit, *Reasons and persons*. OUP Oxford, 1984, 124 and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, 432.

¹⁰ See Quinn, “Putting Rationality in its Place,” p. 32.

psychology: While some take bizire-scenarios to entail that desires are evaluative attitudes, namely, that they track or establish valuable ends and provide justifications, others take such scenarios to demonstrate the opposite—that desires, in and of themselves, do not ethically justify ends. Though these are very different conclusions to be drawn from bizire scenarios, I will argue that they both show, against the skeptic’s claim, that ethical justification *is* required; namely, that the mere fact of desiring an end still does explain why the end is valuable.

First, it is instructive to consider *why* bizire-scenarios lead some philosophers to see desired ends as valuable, and other philosophers to see them as non-valuable. In the first camp, are many of the philosophers who contrived those famous bizire scenarios (e.g., Anscombe, Raz, Parfit and Scanlon). For them, the point of introducing these scenarios was to show that it is not only deficient to act on non-valuable ends, but moreover, that it is *unintelligible* to desire such ends; having bizires is as much a case of irrationality as holding a contradictory set of beliefs simultaneously.¹¹ Accordingly, desires cannot be conceived of as merely psychological inclinations that can have just anything as an object (like “turning on radios”). Rather they are evaluative in their nature. However, ethical justification is still necessary here because we are now moved to ask what makes some ends valuable (and hence a possible object of desire) and others (like radioman’s “turning on radios”) non-valuable.

This need for ethical justification also follows from the position of the second camp, which takes bizires to be *intelligible*. Rather than demonstrating that it is unintelligible to desire non-valuable ends, this camp takes bizire scenarios to show that desired ends are, in

¹¹ For these philosophers, bizire-scenarios demonstrate a point about practical rationality; namely that it is substantive (or contentful), that not everything can be an end—pursuing certain ends is irrational. See, Hooker, Brad, and Bart Streumer, "Procedural and substantive practical rationality." in *The Oxford handbook of rationality* (2004): 67-69. Equivalently, these scenarios can be understood as supporting a strong guise of the good thesis on which we can rationally pursue (or want) only what we consider good or satisfying “desirability conditions.” Joseph Raz, "On the Guise of the Good." *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (2010): 111-137. and Anscombe, intention.

themselves, non-valuable.¹² Hence, for an end to be valuable, it isn't enough that it is desired—there must be something that makes it valuable rather than *merely* desired. Accordingly, *pace* the skeptic, a distinction between valuable and merely desired ends—that is, ethical justification—is required.

For my purposes, what is instructive here is the ground shared by these two camps. For while they do not agree on whether we can have bizires (that is, whether bizires are intelligible) they do agree that not every end is valuable. This means that there is a distinction to be made between valuable and non-valuable ends; and ethical justification is what accounts for this distinction. The difference between the camps is that while, for the first camp (wherein bizires are unintelligible), ethical justification distinguishes between what may and what may not be a possible object of desire, for the second camp (wherein bizires are intelligible), ethical justification distinguishes between valuable desired ends and merely desired ends. In either case, desire alone cannot account for the distinction between valuable and non-valuable ends.¹³

Bizire scenarios thus motivate the need for ethical justification by engineering ends that are, beyond any shadow of a doubt, non-valuable. The pursuit of ends that even the agent herself sees as so clearly and utterly valueless is, luckily, not a common experience for most of us. But it is also not altogether unfamiliar. Take, for instance, cases of whimsical actions, obsessive compulsive behavior, or addictive behavior, which all may be experienced by the

¹² See, James Lenman "The Saucer of mud, The Kudzu vine and the uxorious cheetah: Against neo-Aristotelian naturalism in metaethics." *European journal of analytic philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2005): 37-50, Mark *Slaves of the Passions*. OUP Oxford, 2007: Chapter 5. Donald Hubin "The Groundless Normativity of Instrumental Rationality." *The Journal of Philosophy* 98, no. 9 (2001): 445–68 and Hubin, "Desires, Whims and Values." *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 3 (September 2003): 315–35.

¹³ Note that even if we conceive of desires as evaluative, the bizire scenarios show that they are not valuable *just* because they are *desired*. The point of the radioman scenario is not that "turning on radios" is not valuable because no one could ever desire something like that, but rather vice versa—no one could ever desire something like that *because* it is utterly non-valuable. Hence, *against* the skeptic's claim, the order of explanation is not from what agents desire to what ends are valuable, but rather from what is valuable to what agents can desire.

agent as lacking any value. Even more mundane are those akratic episodes, such as the commonplace experiences of scrolling through Instagram or Twitter not out of joy or curiosity but almost out of boredom, and against the wish to stop and move on with one's day. What these cases have in common is that they are usually considered (even by the agent) to be deficient or abnormal and in many cases marginal. But what about valueless ends that are actually central to an agent's life and often conceived of as normal? Cases like these, I will argue, further motivate the need to account for ethical justification.

While few lives are spent in the pursuit of bizires or compulsions, many are spent chasing ends like the accumulation of wealth or fame. But while the pursuit of such ends is common enough, the rebuttal of their value is just as common. We hear so frequently about rich and famous people who regret having dedicated their lives to a false and empty idol, that such avowals have become clichés. But like many clichés, they disclose a truth about the human condition. We may pursue ends, with all our might, despite thinking (or at least suspecting) that they have no value; that they don't even bring us joy or happiness. This human possibility is crystalized in the cautionary tales of young ambitious careerists who monomaniacally strive to become rich, or the young actor (or aspiring social media celebrity) who works day and night to win a few moments in the spotlight. What is cautionary about these tales is that what their protagonists are motivated and driven to achieve is not aligned with what is valuable, even from the protagonist's point of view.

Common to all these scenarios is a pattern they share with bizires. In all of them we find agents who pursue ends they view simultaneously as final ends (e.g., getting rich, being famous, watching tv) and as non-valuable. Being final means that they are ends for the sake of which actions are taken, and not ends that are pursued merely as means for the sake of further

ends.¹⁴ In pursuing a non-valuable final end, the agent sees no point in her pursuit, and yet, she pursues it for its own sake (and not because of other ends it furthers).¹⁵ Hence, we can say, she is *motivated* by this end, but it does not provide her with justification.

These cases motivate the task of this dissertation, which is to account for ethical justification. Now, so far, my characterization of ‘valuable end’ (a source of justifications rather than motivating reasons) has been rather thin, consisting more in examples than in arguments. A thicker conception of what it is a valuable end will emerge gradually through the dialectical argument of the dissertation. It is also through this argument that I will develop my own view of ethical justification, which I have called organic holism. The argument will advance through a critique of other approaches to ethical justification; beginning from psychologistic accounts, through existentialist and essentialist accounts and ending with rationalistic accounts.

I will begin with critiquing the psychological approach because I take it to be the closest to commonsensical intuitions and therefore less needful of preparatory argumentative work than the other approaches.¹⁶ The essentialist and existentialist approaches will be motivated through the difficulties to which psychologism gives rise; and I will turn to the rationalistic approach in an attempt to overcome the difficulties raised by the essentialist and existentialist approaches.¹⁷

¹⁴ It is important to note that according to this definition, final ends can be either finite or infinite. Moreover, in this dissertation, final ends refer also to generic ends, namely ends that can be instantiated by any number of particular instantiation (e.g., ‘helping friends’).

¹⁵ When one pursues such ends for their own sake, one may come to realize that one inhabits an absurd scenario, not unlike that of the bizire scenarios. For, much like the radioman, one can pursue ends one sees no point in pursuing. Thus, consider “career person” who ambitiously and religiously strives to advance her career. When asked why she aims at climbing in the corporate ladder, she answers that it is not because it gives her pleasure or for the sake of earning a living. When pushed, she ultimately states (in a way that echoes the radioman’s answers) that she does it for nothing else but for the sake of a prestigious career.

¹⁶ By this I do not mean to claim that psychologism is presuppositionless, or, even, that it rests on fewer presuppositions than the other approaches. Rather, it is usually more appealing to common sense intuitions and hence requires less motivating.

¹⁷ Readers will note that the intuitionist approach is absent from the dialectics of my dissertation. This is because rather than accounting for what renders ends valuable, intuitionism presupposes that, as a matter fact,

Outline of the Argument

First Chapter: The psychologistic approach for ethical justification maintains that what renders ends valuable are psychological facts and properties. According to resolute psychologistic accounts, ethical justification consists in psychological properties such as the strength and constancy of desires, the emotions and feelings associated with ends, or the pleasure ends are expected to generate. I argue that all of these proposals ultimately fail for one fundamental reason: Mere psychological properties are passive determinations and as such the agent may find himself alienated from them. But valuing an end requires that the agent sees it as his own; that is, valuing requires *identification*. Furthermore, I show that psychologistic attempts to account for identification¹⁸ fail for the very same reason, namely, because they try to ground identification in merely psychological determinations that are, as such, passive and hence alienable.

Psychologism, I conclude, must be rejected since it cannot account for the *active* nature of valuing. Activity, I argue, can be understood either by principles that are intrinsic to the kind of being the agent is (as proposed by essentialist accounts) or by a special faculty that is purely active because it is wholly undetermined by anything but the agent (as advanced by existentialism). I reject both the essentialist and the existentialist approaches because both fail to account for the *rational* nature of human activity. For creatures like us (rational animals), I show, actively identifying with ends requires that we see the ends we pursue as *justified*. But on

some ends are valuable, and that from the agential viewpoint this reality is known through intuition. Hence, it does not provide an account of what *renders* ends valuable. I will return to this subject after outlining my argument.

¹⁸ Such as Harry Frankfurt's influential suggestion that the agent identifies with desires she also desires to be efficacious. Harry Frankfurt "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 96-111.

existentialism we identify (and value) by an act of pure existential choice that is not determined by justifications; and according to essentialism we identify with ends that are determined by principles that are intrinsic to the kind of beings we are, and these principles may not be justified from the agential viewpoint.¹⁹

Second Chapter: The argument of the first chapter leads to the conclusion that ethical justification consists in rationality; that is, that ends are valuable if they are justified from the agential viewpoint. Since what justifies valuable ends cannot be grounded in passive psychologistic, essentialist or existentialist ends or principles, it follows that ethical justification consists in *formal* rational principles.²⁰ Accordingly, ends are justified (and hence subjectively valuable) if they conform to formal principles. I consider dominant contemporary rationalistic accounts and show that they fail because they run into at least one of the following difficulties:

1. The Distinction Difficulty: If they are to establish ethical justification, formal principles are required to distinguish between valuable and non-valuable (merely desired) ends. I argue that formal principles like “universalization” and “consistence” fail to meet this requirement unless they *presuppose* that some ends are valuable.²¹ But presupposing valuable ends requires that there be another ethical justification by virtue of which these ends are valuable. Hence, formal principles establish, at most, a secondary account ethical

¹⁹ My rejection of essentialism is not absolute. For our conclusion is that we are active only where we act on justified ends, and hence we may say that our internal principle is rational. Where we understand our essence in this manner, i.e., as rational essence, the essentialist and the rationalist approaches come together.

²⁰ In other words, on the rationalistic approach I examine, rationality is formal rather than substantive. I reject substantive rationalistic accounts since they constitute a variety of intuitionism (rational intuitionism). For this reason, I do not discuss intuitionist accounts, see the last section of the introduction.

²¹ This criticism echoes Hegel’s influential “emptiness criticism” of Kant’s universal formula of the categorical imperative. We may say, that without presupposing valuable ends, formal principles are *empty* since they cannot determine what ends are valuable. See, G. W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law*. Translated by T. M. Knox (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 76-79.

justification and must presuppose another, primary, account of ethical justification (e.g., psychologistic or essentialist accounts).

2. The Evaluative Difficulty: Since ethical justification is, by definition, a justification that renders ends subjectively valuable, it must be recognizable as evaluatively relevant; that is, relevant for the agent's active identification with ends. I show that some formal principles (like "universalization" and "systematicity") are evaluatively relevant since they establish agential unity and unity supports identification with ends. However, I argue that the unity established by formal principles ultimately consists in ends that are not justified and hence passive rather than active. Being passive, such ends cannot support active *rational* identification, as we required at the end of the first chapter.
3. The Formalist Dilemma: Since formal principles, by their very nature as *formal*, are devoid of content, they must be applied to contents (i.e., ends, maxims, practices etc.) that are given from another non-rational source (e.g., desires). The application of absolutely formal principles to non-rational contents generates the *formalist dilemma*. The contents to which formal principles are applied are either valuable or non-valuable. If they are non-valuable then formal principles cannot *alchemically* render them valuable; but if contents are valuable then formal principles are idle *qua* ethical justification.

I develop my own account of ethical justification, *organic holism*, by responding to these difficulties, to which each of the remaining chapters attends.

Third Chapter: To overcome the formalist dilemma, I propose that rationalistic accounts of ethical justification ought to introduce a distinction between *potentially* valuable and *actuality* valuable ends. On my proposal, we should conceive of non-justified ends, neither as valuable nor as non-valuable, but rather as *potentially valuable*. Justified ends, on the other hand, are *actually valuable*. Accordingly, formal principles ought to be viewed as *actualizing* the value of

ends. This account avoids the evaluative *alchemy* horn of the dilemma, since formal justification doesn't evaluatively *metamorphose* non-evaluative attitudes; rather it actualizes *potentially* valuable ends. It also avoids the *idleness* horn, for justification is not idle; rather, it is needed to render merely potentially valuable ends *actually valuable*.

Proposing that we should conceive of formal justification as actualizing values comes with many challenges. In coping with some of the main challenges, I show that the best way to understand the actualization of potentially valuable ends is to model it on the actualization of incipient living organs. The essence of living organs is determined by the function they have in the life of the organism (and the species); incipient organs have their essence in potency, and it is actualized through their holistic integration with the other activities of the organism. Similarly, valuable ends are essentially justified. However, a merely desired end is justified (and, hence, valuable) only in *potency*; it is *actually* justified through a process of holistic integration with the agent's other ends. Furthermore, I argue, this integration bears a specific rational form which I call *organic form*; a set of ends is organically formed if they further and support each other. Hence, in an organic whole, ends are justified (and, therefore, *actually* valuable) by furthering and supporting the whole of ends. Thus, an actually valuable friendship is justified by furthering and supporting other ends the agent pursues, like the well-being of her family and her vocation—as long as these are also organically justified.

Moreover, in the process of organic integration, an end is not only justified; rather, its very content is *generated*. This means that a valuable friendship is not just a desire for friendship that also happens to be justified by other desired ends. Rather, what friendship *is* for an agent is generated through the process of organic integration with other ends. *Actually* valuable friendship is organically informed with justifications—i.e., it is an intrinsically justified end.

We may say, accordingly, that the contents of valuable ends are generated in the process of their actualization—they *become* organically formed.

This *generative* aspect of my view marks another break from other rationalistic accounts of ethical justification. In standard rationalistic accounts, like the ones discussed in the second chapter, the formal principle is a principle by which the agent justifies (and hence values) ends that are given by her desires. In other words, on such views, formal principles are applied to a *pre-given* set of non-valuable ends.²² By contrast, in organic holism, the formal principle is, primarily, a *generative* principle; namely, it is a principle by which valuable ends come into being.

Fourth Chapter: That organic holism overcomes the formalist dilemma still does not establish that organic form renders ends valuable; namely, that organic form is an ethical justification. To show that it is an ethical justification it must also be shown that the agent *actively identifies* with organically formed ends. The notion that a formal principle (like organic form) can establish active identification faces two fundamental difficulties: First, as I showed in the second chapter, formal principles (like “universalization” or “systematization”) can establish identification since they unify the agent. However, I argued that this unity consists in ends that are not justified and hence cannot support *active* identification. Therefore, a formal principle (like “organic form”) must establish unity that is fully justified and active. Second, if identification consists in a formal principle, this seems to give rise to what I call “a split in the self.” For it entails that the agent’s desires, in and of themselves, are not the agent’s own. Rather, desires are the agent’s own only by virtue of stepping back from them and considering them through the rational lens of a formal principle. Hence, it follows that value rationalism entails a split between the real (rational) self, and the merely psychological part of the self.

²² As I have noted earlier, if the set of pre-given ends are *valuable* (rather than non-valuable), then the formal principle is idle as an ethical justification.

I argue that organic holism meets both of these challenges. First, like other principles, it establishes identification by constituting agential unity. Organically formed ends are *united* through their mutual justifications. Furthermore, organic unity is *fully active* since all ends are holistically justified. Hence, unlike other formal principles, unity does not consist in certain ‘highest ends’ that are, themselves, not justified and, therefore, passive. Second, due to its generative character, organic holism does not engender a split in the self. For, as shown in the third chapter, on organic holism, valuable ends are *intrinsically* justified (they are organically formed), rather than being justified by stepping back from them. In pursuing ends that belong to her organic unity of desires, the agent need not *step back* from her actual desires and exercise a separate rational capacity to identify with them. Rather, she identifies with her desired ends *in pursuing them*, since they are infused with justifications given through the organic whole of her desired ends.

Fifth Chapter: Of the three difficulties raised in the second chapter, by this point, two have been answered. It remains to be shown that organic holism fares successfully with the “distinction difficulty,” namely, that it distinguishes in the right way between valuable and non-valuable ends. This difficulty comes in two levels. On the “lower,” more fundamental, level, it is the difficulty to distinguish between valuable ends and meaningless ends, such as the ones exemplified in bizires scenarios. I show that formal principles like “universalization” and “consistence” fail even on this fundamental level, because they support merely negative justifications; namely, they justify ends by showing only that they do *not* interfere with other ends. To distinguish between valuable and meaningless ends justification must also be *positive*, namely; namely, it must speak *in favor* of contents (including ends, maxims or practices) rather than merely indicating that they are not in conflict with each other. Organic holism meets this requirement, I argue, for organically formed ends

are justified positively—by furthering and supporting each other and the organic whole of ends. Hence, while bizires are likely be vindicated by merely negative justification (since they may not interfere with other ends), they are very unlikely to further and support the agent’s other justified ends. Indeed, it is *because* bizires have no function in the agent’s life as a *whole*, that they seem so pointless and valueless.

There is also a higher level to the distinction difficulty, to which most of the concluding chapter is dedicated. On this higher level, the difficulty is to distinguish between what we normally consider as *objectively* valuable and what we consider as objectively non-valuable. In particular, the challenge is to distinguish between morally commendable ends and morally reprehensible ends.²³ In answering this difficulty, I develop, in general lines, the moral account that follows from organic holism. I first argue that few, very abstract, moral guidelines and conceptions arise from the notion of “organic form” alone. Thus, since “organic form” accounts for subjectively valuable ends, it also supports an abstract conception of what it means to wrong someone (or do right by someone). To wrong someone means either to inhibit one’s pursuit of organically formed ends or to hinder the process of organically integrating one’s ends. Moreover, from reflecting on organic form alone, we can also see that valuable ends conform to something like an abstract version of the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean; namely, they are to be pursued in the ‘right way’—neither too much or too little.

A much more robust moral conception arises once we introduce to organic holism several rudimentary and uncontroversial assumptions about human nature. This moral conception is best described as a variant of neo-Aristotelianism as I will now turn to show.

²³ Note that this difficulty sends us beyond the initial task of the dissertation, which was, as we will recall, to account for what is *subjectively* valuable, i.e., valuable from the agential viewpoint. However, the issues of objective and subjective values are in my view tightly linked. My account of objective value will emerge from my conception of subjective value.

Organic Holism and Neo-Aristotelianism

Neo-Aristotelianism is often referred to as the third contemporary ethical approach, along with neo-Kantianism and neo-Humeanism. However, the unity and nature of neo-Aristotelianism is less clear than those of the rival approaches. Specifically, there seem to be two distinct principles to which neo-Aristotelians appeal in grounding ethical justifications: *Virtue* and *human nature*. According to the first, the excellence of character is explanatorily prior to either what duty commends or what ends are good.²⁴ On the second approach, human nature is the fundamental source of ethical justifications and is explanatory prior to either reason or desires.²⁵ In many cases, the link between these two principles (virtue and human nature) remains obscure. Moreover, it is not uncommon that neo-Aristotelian accounts concentrate on one of them and neglect the other, so much so that it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of neo-Aristotelian factions.

It is not clear that, and why, these two principles—virtue and human nature—must go together. An indication of their separability emerges from the distinct kinds of criticism leveled against each neo-Aristotelianism faction. A central form of criticism leveled against virtue ethics is that character plays, at most, a secondary role in accounting for ethical justifications.

²⁴ Accordingly, virtue ethics is contrasted with deontological, and teleological approaches to normative ethics. Cf. John Rawls *Theory of Justice*, 23-25; Gary Watson, “On the Primacy of Character” in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character, and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 449-70. Rosalind Hursthouse’s *On Virtue Ethics*. OUP Oxford, 1999 is a *locus classicus* for this line of Aristotelianism. See Also Julia Annas *Intelligent virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁵ See, Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Moral objectivity.” *G. Harman and JJ Thomson, Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 65–154., Peter Geach “Good and Evil” in Philippa Foot, ed., *Theories of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 64-74; Martha Nussbaum *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and “Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics,” in Altham, James Edward John, and Ross Harrison, eds. *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Rosalind Hursthouse *On Virtue Ethics, Chapter 9*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent rational animals: Why human beings need the virtues* (Open Court, 1999).

According to this criticism, virtue ethics always presupposes accounts of either right action (deontology) or good ends (teleology).²⁶ In other words, in accounting for evaluative judgments concerning characters (virtue), we necessarily appeal either to judgments concerning duty or the goodness of ends.²⁷ *Aristotelian naturalism*, on the other hand, is often criticized for committing the naturalistic fallacy. Regardless of what neo-Aristotelians believe the concept of human nature may consist of, these critics argue, human nature can at most indicate how human beings *are*, not how they *should be*. Therefore, no normative—and, hence, ethical—judgment could possibly follow from knowledge concerning our nature.

Organic holism ties together the two neo-Aristotelian principles. Moreover, in doing this, it overcomes the criticism leveled against each separately. This will emerge through considering how the organic-holistic conception for which I argue is innately connected to both virtue and human nature. First, organic holism is a variant of virtue ethics since its fundamental category of evaluation is character. I argue that only given a whole character can we evaluate the rightness of actions or the goodness of ends. The fully organic character—the character in which ends further, sustain and determine each other—is the standard in relation to which we evaluate ends and actions. The merit of this variant of virtue ethics is that it provides the logical grounds for demonstrating that virtue ethics isn't reducible to either teleological or deontological ethics. The rightness of actions and the goodness of ends consists in their belonging to an organically formed character.²⁸

²⁶ See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 24, and Watson, “On the Primacy of Character”, 453.

²⁷ It is important to note that this criticism doesn't imply that virtue is reducible to either rightness or goodness. This, I think, would be absurd. Rather, the point is that it does not play a fundamental role in accounting for ethical justifications.

²⁸ By organically formed character I mean a character of an agent whose desired ends constitute an organic whole.

Second, my view constitutes a variant of *Aristotelian naturalism* since basic human needs and tendencies—or as I shall call them here, *natural desires*—determine to a large extent the ends desired by organically formed characters. Accordingly, natural desires determine (to some extent) what ends are valuable. This follows from the following claims: (1) Human nature consists of natural desires. (2) Desires are, in essence, *potentially* valuable. (3) Within an organically formed whole, desires are *actually* valuable. (4) Since natural desires are not wholly dependent on any particular human society or culture, they figure in all human organically formed life and therefore constitute the backbone of human values. I will now expand on this argument.

My reason for holding that human natural desires are constituents of organic character is similar to the one that Aristotelian naturalists traditionally suggest: These desires fundamentally belong to human nature; it is hard to conceive of human life without them.²⁹ Thus, we typically consider essential, needs such as the need for nutrition, warmth, family, close relationships with other human beings, etc. However, as I noted earlier, the challenge with which Aristotelian naturalists must cope is not so much to defend the claim that there are, indeed, needs and tendencies entrenched in human nature—this claim in itself is not very contentious. The challenge is to overcome the naturalistic fallacy. This brings us to the second claim: In the third chapter, I argue that desired ends—and, hence, also *natural* desired ends—are neither non-valuable, nor actually valuable. Rather they are in, *potentially* valuable. In this respect, *natural* desires are like other desires—they are *potentially* valuable. The difference between natural and other desired ends rests in the fact that while other desired ends are contingent upon cultural, communal and personal variables, naturally desired ends constitute

²⁹ Nussbaum, “Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics,” 106, and Foot *Natural Goodness*.

a set of invariable (but not fully determined) human valuable ends. It is here that the organic-holistic framework of my view provides a satisfying answer to the natural-fallacy accusation against Aristotelian naturalism. Desired ends, including natural human ones, are *actually* valuable only once they are ethically justified, and they are ethically justified only within an organic whole—namely, within an *organic character*. Thus, we overcome the naturalistic fallacy since, on my view, valuable ends are *never* given by nature as actually valuable; rather they are *justified* and *formed* in relation to other ends in an organically formed character. Hence, within an organic character, basic human desires form the backbone of human values—they are both necessary (natural) and justified. Accordingly, they are not merely descriptive but also evaluative.³⁰

To conclude, according to organic holism, Aristotelian-naturalism and virtue ethics are intertwined and both consist in the same logical root, namely, in *organic form*. We consider naturally desired ends as valuable only once we conceive of them as belonging to an organically formed character, which constitutes the primary standard of evaluation.

A Remark on Intuitionism

In the beginning of this introduction I noted that there are five main contemporary approaches for ethical justification. While four of these approaches (the psychologistic, the rationalistic, the essentialist, and the existentialist approach) figure in the outline of my argument, readers will notice that the fifth—the intuitionist approach—does not.³¹ This absence is not owed to

³⁰ It is important to note that this does not mean that human nature *fully* determines human valuable ends trans-culturally and for every individual. Rather, they constitute an open-ended range of potential human life forms.

³¹ Among the forefathers of intuitionism in Anglo-American philosophy are Richard Price (see, Richard Price, 1758/1969, *A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals*, in *The British Moralists 1650–1800, II*, D. D. Raphael (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press). 131–198, G. E. Moore (see his *Principia Ethica*. (Cambridge University Press, 1993))

the many epistemological and metaphysical difficulties associated with intuitionism.³² Rather, I have excluded intuitionism here because it *denies* that any ethical justification is possible from the agential viewpoint. Indeed, what makes a view intuitionist is that it maintains that we know what is valuable *without* any justification.³³ Hence, while other approaches specify what characterizes valuable ends, and what distinguishes them from merely desired ends, intuitionism does not. Instead, according to intuitionism, this distinction is intuitively known. Since the task of this dissertation is to account for ethical justification, intuitionism will not figure in my dialectical argument. Yet, it should be noted that the vindication of intuitionism may still be the unintended *result* of my argument. For if none of the accounts I will consider withstand scrutiny, then my argument as a whole may be seen as a *reductio* argument for either intuitionism or skepticism about ethical justification.

and W. D. Ross (see his *The Right and the Good*. (Oxford University Press, 2002)). Prominent contemporary intuitionists include Robert Audi (see his “Kantian Intuitionism”, *Mind*, 110: 601–635), Jonathan Dancy (*Ethics without Principles*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press)) and David Enoch (see his *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. 1 edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Russ Shafer-Landau (see his *Moral Realism* (Oxford University Press, 2003)).

³² One of the main reasons to reject this position, famously noted by Locke (John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I.iii), is that there are disagreements between people about moral issues, so they cannot be grounded in self-evident views. But there are other serious difficulties: metaphysical, i.e., the existence of mind independent ethical entities, and epistemological, namely, the possibility of making contact with such entities and vindicating claims about them.

³³ Intuitionists divide between those who think justifications (or proofs) are impossible and those who maintain that they may be possible but they are epistemically supererogatory.

1

Psychologism, Essentialism and Existentialism about Value

1.1 Introduction

When we reflect on what we and other agents value, it is rather intuitive to consider the matter in psychological terms. The ends we value seem to depend on what we feel about ends; which ends bring us pleasure and which ends bring us pain. We may also consider what ends we are more motivated to pursue and, perhaps, what ends we identify with. Psychologistic accounts of ethical justification maintain that such psychological properties and facts *ground* ethical justification. Namely, they maintain that what distinguishes valuable ends from merely desired ends are psychological properties and facts.

I begin this chapter by critiquing these psychologistic accounts of ethical justification. I will first argue that mere psychological properties are passive determinations and as such the agent may also find himself alienated to them. But valuing an end requires that the agent sees it as her own; that is, valuing requires identification (section 1.2). Furthermore, I show that psychologistic attempts to account for identification fail for the very same reason, namely, because they try to ground identification in merely psychological determinations that are, as such, passive and hence alienable (section 1.3). Psychologism, I conclude, must be rejected since it cannot account for the *active* nature of valuing. Activity, I argue, can be understood either by principles that are intrinsic to the kind of being the agent is (as proposed by essentialist accounts) or by a special faculty that is purely active (as advanced by existentialism). I reject both the essentialist and the existentialist approaches because both fail to account to the rational nature of human activity. For creatures like us (rational beings), I show, to actively

identify with ends, requires that we see the ends we pursue as justified. But on existentialism we identify (and value) by an act of pure existential choice that is not determined by justifications; and according to essentialism, we identify with ends that are determined by principles that are intrinsic to the kind of beings we are, principles that may not be justified from the agential view point.

1.2 Austere Psychologism

Not only do psychologistic accounts appeal to common sense intuitions, they also seem to be necessitated by a widely popular view in ethics, namely, neo-Humeanism. On the neo-Humean framework, all practical reasons stem from the agent's desires. This means that whether an end provides justifications (namely, it is a valuable end) or provides merely motivating reasons, these ends are similarly the objects of the agent's desires. How, then, can the neo-Humean framework account for ethical justification— that is, for the distinction between valuable ends and merely desired ends—when *all ends* are given by the agent's desire? Philosophers who are strongly committed to the neo-Humean framework often account for ethical justification in terms of purely psychological facts about the agent, like her desires and feelings. On this austere psychologistic approach, while all ends are provided by desires, valuable ends are distinguished by certain psychological properties that apply to them. Most naturally, the distinguishing psychological properties are properties *of* desires; specifically, the relative strength and constancy of desires. Valuable ends, on this view, are the objects of desires that are stronger and more constant relative to other desire. Thus, we may say that Joe *values* the well-being of his family since he is constantly and intensely motivated to further the well-being of his family. Such austere psychological views are numerous and of great variety. In this

section, I will review the main varieties and will argue that they should be rejected; neither strength, nor constancy, nor their conjunction are sufficient conditions for values.

Before I delve into the particular details of different psychologistic accounts, let us begin with a somewhat crude general argument. We can reject the claim that valuable ends are desired ends that are relatively strong and constant by appealing to counterexamples. If it turns out that what agents strongly and constantly desire can diverge from what they value, this will amount to a rejection of the psychologistic thesis at hand. Such clear counterexamples are not hard to find, as the numerous examples in the literature from Plato and on indicate.¹ Consider the following example: Joe has constant and strong desires for sweets and liquor. Yet, it is wrong to infer from this fact that he values eating sweets and drinking liquor. Rather, these may be merely constant and strong desires he has, desires that may even happen to be incompatible with what he values (e.g., family life and good health).

As I said before, counterexamples of this kind are found in abundance in the literature. However, whether such counterexamples warrant the rejection of the psychologistic view under consideration cannot be assessed without first saying more on how each particular psychologistic account conceives of the notions of strength and constancy of desires. For the way in which these notions are conceived, determines how each account fares with different counterexamples. Therefore, our criticism shall take several dialectical steps, each focused on a different conception of these notions. There are three main kinds of accounts of desires that

¹ Here is an early example from Plato's Republic: "*Leontius, the son of Aglaion, coming up one day from the Piraeus, under the north wall on the outside, observed some dead bodies lying on the ground at the place of execution. He felt a desire to see them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, Look, ye wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.*" [439e], also see the Gorgias 494c-d. For a contemporary example, see Gary Watson "Free Agency" in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). 96-111.

are relevant for our discussion:² feeling-based, motivation-based, and pleasure-based accounts.³ My purpose in the next subsections is not to criticize these accounts qua accounts of desire. Rather, I intend to show that neither of these accounts of desire can properly establish the distinction between valuable and merely desired ends.

1.2.1 Feeling-Based Conception of Desire

It may seem, pre-philosophically, that having a strong desire means having a strong positive feeling or emotion in relation to the attainment or avoidance of a certain end. It is undeniable that often desires are accompanied by an occurrent feeling and even inseparable from this feeling. Thus, there is a distinct feeling in craving one's favorite dessert, and it is hard to conceive of such craving without it consisting in a feeling. The same holds for desires such as lust. Moreover, many other desires, although separable from feelings, may still be connected in various ways to feelings. Thus, desires for revenge are fueled by anger and resentment, and desires to hurt others may spring from feelings of jealousy or envy. Feeling-based accounts view feelings as *constitutive* for desires. On such accounts, the strength of a desire is determined by the strength of the feeling in which a desire consists. The constancy of a desire, on the other hand, depends on the constancy of the feeling in which a desire consists. Thus, if one's positive feeling toward a certain end occurs often, then it constitutes a constant desire; the more rarely and intermittently the feeling occurs, the less constant the desire is. If valuable

² By relevant to our discussion I mean ones that accounts for ethical judgment in purely psychological terms. This is the reason I will not discuss accounts on which desires are understood as *consisting in* ethical judgment, for they are unfit to be used in a psychologistic account of ethical judgments. For this kind of accounts, see Thomas Scanlon *What we owe to each other* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Graham Oddie, *Value, Reality, and Desire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

³ For a recent work on the variety of conceptions of desires, see Timothy Schroeder *Three faces of desire* (Oxford University Press, 2004) also, Timothy Schroeder and Nomy Arply and *In praise of desire* (Oxford University Press, 2013) Chapters 4-6.

ends are the objects of relatively strong and constant desires, then, on this account, what determines the value of ends is the relative strength and constancy of the feeling in which desires consist.⁴

I will now argue that the strength and constancy of desire, as it is understood in feeling-based accounts, fails to serve as either a necessary or a sufficient condition for the distinction between valuable and merely desired ends. First, note that on this account, relatively strong and constant desires may be utterly non-valuable. For even if we assume that Joe's positive feelings with regard to sweets and liquor are strong and constant, it still seems compatible with his not valuing sweets and liquor. Joe may experience strong and constant feelings of longing and attraction for sweets, ones significantly exceeding any feelings he has regarding the maintenance of his health. However, it would be wrong to infer that Joe values sweets more than his health, for example. Feeling attracted to ends we consider harmful and worthless is by no means an unfamiliar experience. Hence, strength and constancy of desires (on a feeling-based account) are not sufficient conditions for the value of ends.

Nor are they necessary conditions. It is often noted, even by neo-Humeans, that valuing ends is not always accompanied by any distinct feeling.⁵ Thus, Joe may take the well-being of his family to be of the greatest importance. He may be strongly motivated to care for his family and strive to form his life in a way that is conducive to their well-being. While many of his everyday activities, such as career-related activities or the work he puts into maintaining his house, are motivated by his care for his family, he need not, and probably usually does not,

⁴ Accordingly, an end is valuable if it is associated with feelings that are stronger and constant relative to a relevant set of desires, i.e., one's subjective motivation set (SMS).

⁵ See, Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", Smith, *The Moral Problem* and Mark Schroeder *Slaves of the Passions* (OUP Oxford, 2007): first chapter. Cf. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).

have any feelings while being so motivated. My point here is not to deny that Joe has feelings related to his family. Rather, it is to stress that his feelings need not accompany his familial activities, and even more importantly, their strength and frequency need not be the measure of Joe's dedication to his family, dedication expressed daily by his actions.⁶ For the psychologistic theorist to be able to cope with the challenge of distinguishing between valuable and merely desired ends, we conclude that he must not conceive of strength and constancy based on occurrent feelings.⁷

Notice that my arguments in this subsection hold also for theories that account for valuable ends in terms of feelings and emotions, without the mediation of desires. For I have shown that occurrent feelings are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for valuing ends; and if we dissociate feelings from desires, this can only weaken their link to valuable ends because valuing an end seems to imply a certain level of motivation to pursue it.⁸ Thus, we have concluded that Joe's strong positive feelings toward sweets do not entail that he values consuming sweets; this conclusion will be even stronger if we also know that Joe's positive feelings do not imply that he has any desire for sweets—namely, that he is not motivated to consume them.

Now, since I will not revisit feeling-based theories of ethical justification in the rest of the dissertation, I wish to add a couple of remarks here to provide a fuller criticism of this kind of theories. First, it is sometimes argued that while valuable ends do not consist in a

⁶ One may raise the following objection: While Joe may not have any occurrent feelings when working or maintaining his home, he is motivated by other feelings he experiences at other times, like the great affection for his wife and kids or episodes of anxiety prompted by thoughts of any harm done to them. While this may be true, I think that it is not necessary. One may be entirely devoted to his family as well as taking it as the most precious of his values while also having relatively little occurrent feelings of the aforementioned kind.

⁷ See Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" and Timothy Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire*,

⁸ For an argument against the separation of values and practical motivation, see the appendix of the fifth chapter.

particular kind of feeling, “valuing something makes one vulnerable to feelings and emotions of many different kinds concerning that thing.”⁹ Accordingly, if Joe values his family, it entails that if his family is harmed he will experience negative emotions, like anger, regret, confusion, and despair. This suggestion seems very plausible. However, it is clear that emotional vulnerability is not a sufficient condition for valuing. We are often emotionally vulnerable to merely desired ends. Thus, if Joe finds out that the bakery has run out of baklava while he is in the midst of strongly craving sweets, Joe may feel anger and disappointment. This emotional experience may resemble an emotional experience Joe may have with relation to an end he values, but this does not mean that he values sweets. In fact, even as he is experiencing anger and disappointment, Joe may very well be aware of the silliness of these emotions, given that he does not value consuming sweets and resents his sweet tooth. We see, then, that emotional vulnerability might be associated not only with valuable ends, but more generally with desired ends, even with one the agent detests.¹⁰

Now for the second remark: Throughout this subsection, I have treated ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ as synonymous. However, while some theorists conceive of emotions as a class of feelings,¹¹ others maintain that emotions, unlike mere feelings, are intentional and cognitive.¹² Emotions, cognitively understood, unlike mere feelings, consist of a veridical

⁹ Samuel Scheffler, *Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory*. (Oxford University Press, 2010): 23. For a similar suggestion, see Niko Kolodny "Love as valuing a relationship." *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 2 (2003): 135-189.

It should be noted that both Scheffler and Kolodny do not advance a feeling-based account. Rather, both maintain that valuing is a compound of feelings, belief, and desire. I will address this compound view in the appendix of the fifth chapter.

¹⁰ It may also be argued that emotional vulnerability isn't even a necessary condition for valuing. Thus, in the face of a tragic loss, some people enter a state characterized by the absence of emotions. However, this kind of apathy is normally understood as a temporary shock-state, to be superseded by other stages of mourning.

¹¹ In Anglo-American philosophy, this position is traced back to William James “What is an Emotion?” *Mind*, 9 (1884): 188–205.

¹² See, Martha Nussbaum *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Anthony Kenny. *Action, Emotion and Will*, London (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Humanities Press, 1963).

aspect; namely, they can be merited or unmerited. On this conception, being angry at someone consists of seeing her as guilty of some offense, and it is a merited emotion if she is indeed guilty; being afraid of something consists of seeing it as posing a threat, and it is merited if it is indeed posing a threat.¹³ By the same token, it may be suggested that having an evaluative emotion toward something consists of seeing it as valuable (or seeing it as having a property we conceive of as valuable), and it is merited if that thing is indeed valuable.

Now, the cognitive conception of the emotions surely has its merits. However, in the context of this section, it is irrelevant because rather than accounting what constitutes something as valuable, it presupposes such an account. For only by virtue of such an account can we assess whether the emotion is merited. Thus, just like anger presupposes an account of what constitutes someone as guilty of an offense and fear presupposes an account of what poses a threat, so evaluative emotions must presuppose an account of what is valuable (or evaluatively relevant)—and hence, what merits evaluative emotions. But such an account is exactly what we *cannot* presuppose in this section, for our task is to explore psychologistic accounts of ethical justification, namely, accounts of what *renders* ends valuable. It is for that reason that I did not consider above cognitive conceptions of emotions and treated emotions as a kind of feelings, and as such, I rejected them as a basis for an account of ethical justification.

¹³ Cognitivists divide into those who, following the stoics, conceive of emotions as judgments (see, Martha Nussbaum C. *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*) and those who conceive of emotions as compounds of judgments and other elements, like a set of desires, beliefs, and feelings. See, Justin Oakley. *Morality and the Emotions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992). This distinction does not bear on my discussion here.

1.2.2 Motivational Conception of Desire

Strength and constancy of desires are sometimes understood in terms of the relative capacity of desires to determine the agent's will.¹⁴ A desire is strong if, compared to a certain relevant set of desires, it tends to determine the agent's will, in cases it conflicts with other desires; it is constant if it tends to determine one's will for long periods of time and with fewer lapses, compared to a certain relevant set of desires.

This conception of strength and constancy of desires does not fare better with counterexamples than the previous one. Let's begin with strength: Joe's desire for sweets and liquor often determines his will, overriding other incompatible desires (including, his desire to be healthy). Now, surely, this by no entail that Joe values sweets and liquor more than he values his health. Indeed, it does not even imply that he values liquor and sweets at all; he may see his desiring them as a violent urge that, to his chagrin, often seizes his will.

On this conception, just like the relative strength of desire, the constancy of desires also fails to properly differentiate between valuable and merely desired ends. Thus, assume that Joe is also a patriot. He values his country's existence and prosperity. Fortunately, Joe lives in prosperous and safe times, and therefore, occasions to act on patriotic values are rare. If strength and constancy are the measures of a value, then it may seem that Joe values sweets and liquor more than he values his country. For it would be hard to assess the strength of Joe's

¹⁴ This kind of view goes naturally with the motivational account of desire, on which the essence of desires is that they cause action. For an influential contemporary formulation of the view, see Smith, *The Moral Problem*. Chapter 1. See also, Timothy Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire*, chapter 1. And Schroeder and Arpaly *In Praise of Desire*, 110-116.

patriotism, given that it is hardly put to the test, just as it would be difficult to determine whether his patriotism is constant, since it rarely motivates him.

A supporter of the motivational account of desire might respond to this objection by proposing a dispositional (or a counterfactual) fix to the account, according to which a desire is strong if in cases of conflict with other desires (of a certain relevant set), it will defeat them and determine the agent's will. By contrast to previous non-dispositional conceptions of strength, here it may be the case that a desire is strong, although it rarely actually determines the will. Similarly, a desire is constant if relative to other desires (of a certain relevant set), it is more probable to arise if certain relevant conditions are satisfied. This means that, even if a desire rarely (or even never) arises, it may still be a constant desire if it would arouse relatively often if the conditions for its activation were often met.¹⁵

The dispositional conception of strength and constancy seem to overcome some of the difficulties previous conceptions encountered. First, it allows for cases where valuable ends (understood as strong and constant desires) may fail on several occasions to determine one's will. For it may be the case that a strong desire failed to determine the agent's will on several occasions because accidentally on these occasions it conflicted with many other desires that, with joined forces, defeated the relatively strong desire. Therefore, desire's failure to determine one's will is compatible with it being strong. Second, understood counterfactually, a desire may be constant, although it hardly ever determines one will. Thus, Joe is a patriot and has a constant desire to defend his country. Fortunately, Joe lives in prosperous times and therefore

¹⁵ Michael Smith is a contemporary champion of this view. Michael Smith, "The Humean theory of motivation." *Mind* 96, no. 381 (1987): 36-61. For criticism of the view, see Dennis Stampe, "Defining desire," in J. Marks (ed.), *The Ways of Desire*, (Chicago: Precedent, 1986); W. Davis, "The two senses of desire," in J. Marks (ed.), *The Ways of Desire* (Chicago: Precedent, 1986); J. Marks, "On the need for theory of desire," in J. Marks (ed.), *The Ways of Desire*, (Chicago: Precedent, 1986); and John McDowell. "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Supplement), 52 (1978): 13-29.

occasions to act on his patriotic desire are rare. Yet, it remains true that this desire is constant, since at any point in his adult life, Joe would be motivated to defend his country if he were required. Having a strong desire, then, means having a disposition to act on this desire, even in face of conflicting desires, and a constant desire means a desire that motivates the agent whenever the right occasion arises.¹⁶

However, even on a counterfactual understanding of desire, the strength and constancy of desire may not indicate that it is valuable for the agent. Joe's desires for sweets and liquor are both actually and counterfactually strong and constant. Namely, they often determine his will, even in the face of other incompatible desires; moreover, if considered counterfactually against other strong dispositions, they are relatively strong and constant. However, it remains true, as in the cases discussed above, that he does not value these desires. Moreover, in such a case, he may view their strength and constancy as regrettable facts about his psychological make up, rather than a manifestation of their value.¹⁷

1.2.3 Hedonic Conception of Desire

Some philosophers account for desires in terms of pleasure and displeasure. On this kind of conception, we desire something because it brings us pleasure (or we expect that it will bring us pleasure) or prevent pain.¹⁸ Accordingly, what determines the strength and constancy of a desire is the strength and constancy of the pleasure/displeasure in which it consists. In that

¹⁶ And provided that no accumulatively stronger set of desires motivates the agent to act otherwise.

¹⁷ This argument shows that the strength and constancy of motivation is not a sufficient condition for valuable ends. Cases of akrasia show that they are not even necessary.

¹⁸ For such theories see G. Schueler, *Desire: Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995; C. Morillo, "The reward event and motivation," *Journal of Philosophy*, 87, 1990.: 169–86; and Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire*.]

light, the greater the pleasure associated with a desired end, the more valuable is the end.¹⁹ What makes it difficult to assess the success of this hedonic account of ethical justification is that it is far from being clear what “pleasure” means and accounts of pleasures vary greatly. It is, therefore, helpful to note that among the main accounts of pleasure, most can be dismissed as irrelevant to the undertaking at hand, since they rely conceptually on either evaluative or desiderative notions; that is, the same notions we are trying to explicate by appealing to pleasure.²⁰

Thus, pleasure is often understood as the feeling one has when one satisfies a desire.²¹ However, understood in this way, pleasure cannot assist in explicating the notion of strong and constant desires, since on this account, we understand pleasure in terms of the desire that brings it about.²² Equally unhelpful are accounts of pleasure that consist in evaluative notions,²³ since our focus in this section is on accounts that explain ethical justification by appeal to pleasure, where pleasure is understood as a merely psychological state. Hence, we cannot

¹⁹ To somewhat simplify the discussion, I will discuss “pleasure” and ignore “pain.”

²⁰ On this kind of accounts, what makes something pleasurable is cashed out either in desiderative terms (pleasure is the state that holds upon desire satisfaction) or in evaluative terms. Thus, if we understand pleasure as the restoration of bodily or mental health (or in being in, or acting in form, a state of perfection), we require an account of mental and bodily health, and these are evaluative notions. For accounts in this spirit, see Plato *Philebus* 31D-32E, Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, 11–14 and X, 1–6; Spinoza *Ethics* III, *Proposition 11, Scholium* (“By Joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the mind passes to a great perfection.*” Curley’s translation), Elijah Millgram “What’s the Use of Utility?”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29,2 (2000): 122–26. Richard Moran “Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life”, in Sarah Buss and Lee Overton (eds.), *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt* (Overton, 189-217. MIT Press, 2002): 209–14.

²¹ Thus, Henry Sidgwick claims that the only common quality he can find in various feelings we designate as pleasurable is the “relation to desire and volition expressed by the general term “desirable”. *The Methods of Ethics* (Hackett Publishing, 1907[1981]): 127.

²² More accurately, this account is unhelpful if the strength and constancy of pleasures are understood by reference to the strength and constancy of the desires that brought them about. However, it is possible that while we understand the essence of pleasure by reference to desire satisfaction, we understand the strength and constancy of pleasures by reference to phenomenal or evaluative aspects of pleasure. Such cases are discussed below.

²³ In contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, Anscombe’s evaluative conception of pleasure has been especially influential. See Anscombe, *Intention*, 77–78. And *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1-19. Note that I am not criticizing here evaluative conceptions of pleasure. Rather, I’m arguing that such conceptions cannot be used in reductive accounts of value. For a similar criticism see Korsgaard *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford University Press, 2009): 120-122.

appeal to pleasure if it is understood evaluatively. This excludes from our discussion not only accounts on which the experience of pleasure is constitutively infused with the agent's evaluative outlook,²⁴ but also accounts on which pleasure is supervenient upon processes, states, or activities that are evaluative in nature. Thus, irrelevant to our discussion are accounts inspired by the Aristotelian view that pleasure consists in unimpeded activities that are good for members of a species; for this view already ties pleasure with evaluation.²⁵ The same holds for the Platonic view that associates pleasure with a restoration or improvement in the agent's condition.²⁶

Having excluded evaluative and desire-based accounts of pleasure, we are left with one prominent account of pleasure—i.e., phenomenalism about pleasure. According to this account, pleasure is a distinct kind of feeling, identifiable independently of any standing evaluations or desires. In its purest form, phenomenalist accounts conceive of pleasure as a simple univocal feeling which is found, in varying strengths, in all pleasurable experiences.²⁷ On this view, pleasure can serve in a reductive account of ethical judgment: Ends are valuable in as much as they promise a relatively strong and constant feeling of pleasure. Accordingly, ends that promise no feeling of pleasure, are non-valuable and if they are still desired in some sense, we may then say that they are merely desired ends.

²⁴ Cf. W. Helm, "Emotional and Practical Reason: Rethinking Evaluation and Motivation," *Noûs*, 35(2), 2001: 190–213; W. Helm, "Felt Evaluations: A Theory of Pleasure and Pain," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 39(1), 2002: 13–30. Richard Moran, "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life, 209–14.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.11–13

²⁶ See, Elijah Millgram, *Practical Induction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): Chapter 6, pp. 105–40 and Timothy Schroeder, 2001, "Pleasure, Displeasure and Representation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 31(4): 507–30.

²⁷ This kind of phenomenalism about pleasure is perhaps most associated in modern philosophy with the views of John Locke and Jeremy Bentham. See J. Bentham, "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, eds." *Burns and HLA Hart London: Methuen* (1789) and John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II, xx, 1.

Now, the phenomenal conception of pleasure has been criticized in several ways, as part of the criticism leveled against utilitarianism (e.g., Gilbert Ryle and Elizabeth Anscombe), but it was also criticized by utilitarians such as John Stuart Mill.²⁸ First, it is very doubtful that there is any distinct simple feeling associated with all the experiences we consider pleasurable. That there is one shared quality of feeling has been rejected, even by staunch utilitarians such as Henry Sidgwick.²⁹ Thus, while I take pleasure in both studying psychoanalytic theory and munching mini-pretzels while staring at the TV, it is hardly the case that there is one identical quality of feeling common to both experiences.³⁰ This well noted heterogeneity of pleasurable feelings challenges the integrity of the phenomenalism about pleasure. For it entails that what constitutes an experience as pleasurable is not a distinct quality feeling, and hence, the very nature of pleasure cannot be explained by appealing to a distinct feeling. This led phenomenologists to suggest that what renders a feeling pleasurable is not a distinct quality of feeling but rather that the feeling is desirable, as Sidgwick suggested.³¹ But, in the context of our discussion, it would seem entirely futile to appeal to desiderative notions to account for pleasurable feelings. For as we have noted earlier, the whole point of the accounts under consideration is to explain features of desires by appealing to pleasure. Hence, in this context, it would be circular to account for pleasure in terms of desires.

However, a phenomenologist about pleasure may respond that though desirability explains what renders feelings pleasurable, focusing on pleasurable *feelings* can still be useful to

²⁸ Mill famously rejected the view that all pleasures are of the same quality. Instead, he held that there are two qualitatively different kinds of pleasures, higher and lower. He also shared with Ryle and Anscombe the Aristotelian insight that pleasure cannot be severed from activities. Anscombe, *Moral Modern Philosophy*, Ryle, Gilbert, "Pleasure." In *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1964) 195-205. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Chapter IV. For more recent criticism, see F. Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004): 56.

²⁹ Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 125-131.

³⁰ Indeed, it is not even clear that the study of psychoanalytic theory involves any distinct *feeling*.

³¹ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* 125-131. For a more contemporary variant of this suggestion, see David Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 493-94

distinguish more and less strong and constant desired ends. In other words, while being desired is what makes a feeling *pleasurable*, what makes it strong is the intensity of the *feeling* itself (rather than, say, the strength of the desire). According to this proposal, an end is valuable if it is associated with a relatively strong and constant *desirable feeling*. The problem with this proposal is that the heterogeneity of pleasurable feelings undermines not only the integrity of phenomenalist accounts of pleasure, but also the capacity of such accounts to undergird *comparisons* between ends; namely to rank more or less strong and constant feelings. Once we consider feelings of pleasure to be of different qualities or kinds, it becomes unclear what it would mean for a feeling of pleasure to be relatively stronger than another. Is the pleasurable feeling I experience in reading and thinking about psychoanalytic theory stronger or weaker than the distinct pleasure of munching mini-pretzels while staring at the tv? If feelings of pleasure are qualitatively different from each other, they cannot function as a common metric by virtue of which we can rank the strength of desired ends. Hence, pleasure cannot establish the distinction between valuable and merely desired ends.³²

In acknowledging the plurality of pleasurable feelings, then, phenomenism about pleasure cannot establish a general distinction between stronger and weaker desires. Yet, it may be proposed that it can support a *binary* distinction between valuable and merely desired ends. This can be achieved if we understand feelings of pleasure to be the mark of valuable ends, and the lack thereof, to mark merely desired ends. Thus, both studying psychoanalytic

³² John Rawls developed an influential variant of this criticism. He argued, following Anscombe, that if, as it seems to many, pleasure indeed consists in no simple unitary feeling, then it cannot support any useful guidance in ethical or political matters. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 559, n. 27. This criticism is especially powerful against utilitarians like Sidgwick who require that ethics furnish us with a useful standard for decisions, and who reject any ethical system that fails to do so (cf. III, xi with III, xiv of Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*). While I do not, in general, think that ethical theory must support a decision theory, I do think that an ethical theory must minimally make intelligible the distinction between valuable and non-valuable ends. Since this distinction is supposed to be given in terms of stronger and more constant desires, at this stage of my argument a failure to support these terms is tantamount to a failure of establishing ethical justification.

theory and munching mini-pretzels are valuable since they are pleasurable, while counting blades of grass is not valuable since I find no pleasure in it. One striking problem with this suggestion is that it is not so clear that ends we value are necessarily associated with any feelings of pleasure. Thus, an agent may value honesty and truthfulness, while feeling no pleasure in acting honestly and truthfully. In such cases, we may say that he acts from duty rather than from pleasure or desire, but this is, clearly, compatible with the agent conceiving of his acts as valuable. Moreover, it isn't clear that feeling pleasure is a sufficient condition for valuable ends. Thus, the same agent who values honesty and truthfulness may find chicanery and deceitfulness infinitely more amusing and pleasurable but, nonetheless, considers them valueless. That he experiences pleasure in such detestable activities, he takes to be a shameful fact about his psychology, rather than anything of value.

For another example of the separability of pleasure and value, consider a case where Joe's family life turns out to be a source of much more pain than pleasure. Thus, the birth of Joe's first daughter, Deborah, was far from pleasurable; indeed, it was fraught with worries (about livelihood, about his neglected career, about not being a good parent, about Deborah's delayed development, about his wife's fatigue) and displeasures caused by severe sleep deprivation, as well as by his sympathy for the infant who was often in pain. Now, if pleasure was indeed what accounts for value, then it is undeniable that Joe's family, at this period, had no positive value; indeed, if anything, it had a negative value.

But this seems intuitively wrong. It is not implausible that, even during this difficult period, Joe valued nothing more than his family. A phenomenalist about pleasure may propose that, in the long run, family usually provides pleasures in abundance and, hence, argue that Joe values family life for its prospects, rather than for its present and past. But this need not be the case. For we may suppose that even if Joe knows that his family life is not going to get

easier—that money will be tight, that his children will go through harsh periods, and that his relationship with his wife will not be rosy—and, in general, that he shall experience more feelings of displeasure than pleasure, even then, it is far from absurd to suppose that he still values his family very much. This shows that value and pleasure (understood phenomenally) are separable and that the first cannot be reduced to the latter.

While these objections are quite powerful, I wish to propose another line of criticism that I consider more fundamental. Accounting for ethical justification on the basis of feelings of pleasure entails that what we value are not the objects of our desires but rather the feelings these objects bring about. Now, while this may seem plausible in the case of Joe’s desire for sweets, it seems outrageous to capture Joe’s valuing of his family in this way. What makes his family valuable to him is not that it is a reliable source of intense feelings of pleasure. Rather, what is valuable are his children and wife, and their shared activities and their plans, hopes, and dreams.

We can also see that pleasure and value come apart by reflecting on the “the pleasure chip” thought experiment: “The pleasure chip,” once implanted in one’s brain, can generate all feelings of pleasure.³³ Thus, the pleasure chip can generate in Joe every pleasure associated with happy family life. Instead of feeling anxious about his children’s weak performances in school, he would experience the proud pleasure that he would feel if his children were academically excellent. And instead of the drudgery of family routines, Joe would feel the pleasurable excitement of happy family holidays. However, it seems highly doubtful that these generated feelings would seem valuable at all to Joe. Indeed, it is plausible that, given their

³³ This thought experiment echoes Robert Nozick’s famous “experience machine.” However, while Nozick’s point is that what we care about is our real life rather than simulated life, my point is to show that what we value are objects of our will (or desire) and not (only) feelings to which these objects give rise. See, R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974): 43-44.

incongruence with his family's actual hardships, Joe would see the pleasurable feelings as distasteful and undesirable; he may experience them as alienated from his real concerns and as a mockery of his struggles. The pleasure chip experiment shows, again, that we should reject the reductive attempt to account for evaluation in terms of pleasurable feelings. Moreover, it suggests that we should also doubt that feelings of pleasure are valuable at all, when they are considered independently of what we value. However, for the purposes of this section, I do not need to argue for this stronger conclusion. It is sufficient that we have seen that pleasure, phenomenally understood, may, at most, be a limited kind of valuable end, but that it cannot account for ethical justification—that is, for the distinction between valuable and merely desired ends.

1.2.4 Conclusion

In this section, I have considered attempts to account for ethical justification in purely psychological terms and rejected prominent accounts of this kind. We have seen that the distinction between valuable ends and merely desired ends cannot be established in terms of positive feelings (or emotions) in relation to the object of desire (1.2.1), or in terms of the motivational force of desires (1.2.2), or in terms of the pleasure associated with the objects of desires (1.2.3). Now, surely, I cannot claim that our review is exhaustive, namely, that it covers all the possibilities of psychologistic accounts of ethical justification. However, by seeing the fundamental flaw shared by the accounts I did discuss, we should be able to see why all accounts of this kind will meet with similar criticism.

While each of these accounts fail for slightly different reasons, fundamentally, they are all flawed in a similar way. They account for what is valuable for an agent in terms of

psychological determinations, in relation to which the agent is *passive*. Considered in themselves (i.e., independently of evaluation and reason), feelings and motivations can be wholly accidental and passive from the agential viewpoint. The problem is that what we value cannot be a *mere* accident for us;³⁴ we cannot see what we value as a mere empirical fact about us, akin to the facts like our place of birth, our height and eye color. Indeed, what gives so much force to the case of bizires is that they concern ends that are entirely accidental (and hence, meaningless) from the agential point of view. Thus, the agent just *finds herself* drawn to turning on radios; the agent just *finds in herself* an urge to lick a wall. Valuing seems to stand in sharp contrast to the passivity evinced in the case of such desired ends.

Seeing the fundamental problem of the accounts reviewed above, allows us to generalize the conclusion of this section to every account that consists merely in passive psychological determinations. All such accounts, even variants that are not covered in our discussion, should fail for the same reason; namely, because they consist in determinations that are *passive* from the agential viewpoint, while valuing is active. We require, accordingly, that accounts of ethical justification establish a distinction between ends that are the agent's own and ones she finds herself passively drawn to, pleased by, or motivated by.³⁵ At the bare minimum, this requirement asks that we must not conceive of valuable ends as wholly passively determined, but rather as ends in relation to which the agent is somewhat active; for example, ends the agent endorses, approves of, or identifies with.

³⁴ By this I do not intend to say that there is *nothing* accidental in what we value.

³⁵ It should be clear that my claim here is not that motivations, and feelings of attraction and pleasure are unrelated to what we value. There is no question that in the good cases, what we value attracts us, motivates us, and brings us pleasure. But this does not entail that either attraction, motivation and pleasure is what renders ends valuable, as argued by the accounts discussed in this section.

This requirement poses a serious challenge for austere psychologistic theorists, since, by definition, they account for ethical justification *only* by appealing to psychological states and properties, and these, as we have suggested, appear passive. However, the appearance of passivity did not discourage a group of philosophers with psychologistic commitments (neo-Humeans) from developing accounts that try to overcome the apparent passivity of psychological states. In the next section, I will consider their attempts to meet the challenge.

1.3 Identification

1.3.1 What is Identification?

As we have just seen, what is valuable cannot be a matter of merely passive determination, since such a determination is alienable. Valuable ends are those the agent holds actively; the ones with which she identifies. So far, I have been using the notions of activity/passivity and identification/alienation rather loosely. Since these notions will be crucial to the discussion in the rest of the dissertation, I begin this section by clarifying what I mean by identification. The notion of activity will become clearer in the course of the section.

In everyday language, we use the ‘identification’ and ‘to identify’ in a variety of ways. Thus, we can identify with a character in a novel or with experiences a friend is sharing with us. In such cases, identification may mean something close to sympathy or an acknowledgement of shared patterns of behavior, thought, or feelings among different agents. We can also speak about our ‘identity,’ namely, about properties that make us what we are. Thus, being a teacher is not only something I happen to do, or a biographical piece of trivia (like the fact that I am of a Belarussian decent); rather, being a teacher is part of who *I am*, part of my *identity*. What kind of ‘identification’ or ‘identity’ is relevant to our investigation?

Since our interest here is in ethical justification, the notion of identification interests us in so far as it can establish the distinction between valuable ends and merely desired ends. Hence, we shall focus on *identification* with one's *ends*.³⁶ When an agent identifies with an end of hers, it means that she takes it to be *her own*. Thus, Joe identifies with the end of having a robust family and community life. He takes as his own activities that are conducive to these ends, like visiting his aunt or volunteering at the local youth center. On the other hand, he considers his compulsive attraction to sweets somewhat alienating. When he encounters the familiar urge to go to the supermarket and refill his candy cabinet, he takes this urge as an intrusion—as an alien force he is seized by.

We see, then, that identification, in the sense that interest us, distinguishes between what ends are the agent's own and what aren't. Hence, it requires a distinction between what ends belong to the agent and what ends do not belong the agent. Or in other words, it requires a distinction between what is internal and what is external to the agent. Our first step is to consider psychologistic accounts of this distinction. Such accounts, as we have seen, cannot reduce identification to the psychological properties we have considered in the previous section. Indeed, our conclusion was that psychological determinations, in isolation, cannot suffice for establishing identification. The psychologistic accounts we shall now consider attempt to overcome this difficulty by developing a structured conception of the will; one in which the agent doesn't merely find feelings and desires within herself, but also has a certain *relation* to her psychological determinations. We shall see that these accounts ultimately fail because they afford a merely passive, rather than active, conception of identification.

³⁶ Our discussion of identification with ends is ultimately related to the other, every day uses of identification I've just mentioned. Thus, we shall see in the next chapter that in some neo-Kantian accounts, identification with ends is accounted for in terms of the agent's practical *identity*.

1.3.2 Higher-order desires

In “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Harry Frankfurt proposed that acting as a person, rather than wantonly, is acting on desires one also desires to act on. In desiring to act on a desire, I’m not merely determined by a desire, but rather, it is my own desire—a desire with which I *identify*. Thus, Joe has a desire to eat sweets; it is a first order desire. If he also desires not to act on his first order desire to eat sweets, this would be a second order desire.³⁷ Frankfurt maintains that an agent who has *no* second order desires is a wanton, and his lack of second order desires discloses his “mindless indifference to the enterprise of evaluating his own desires and motives.”³⁸ By contrast, she who has second order desires considers some courses of action preferable to others. She takes some of her first order desires to be truly her own; they are not merely psychological passive inclinations she happens to have, rather she identifies with them.³⁹ Hence, Frankfurt believes that the notion of higher orders of desires provides a neo-Humean conception of what it means to identify with certain inclinations or courses of actions, namely, to make them one’s own. Ethical justification, accordingly, consists in the notion of higher orders of desires: The answer to the question “Why is μ -ing valuable?” is that one has a second (or higher) order desire that the desire to μ -ing be efficacious.

However, the notion of orders of desires, despite its promise, cannot save neo-Humeans from the passivity of psychological determinations. Just as an agent finds himself

³⁷ Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 84-85. David Lewis has endorsed the higher order desire view as the basis for his own account of ethical justification. See David Lewis, “Dispositional theories of value.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*. 63 (1989): 89-174 and Peter Railton, “Lewis on Value and Valuing.” In *A Companion to David Lewis* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015): 533-548.

³⁸ Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 89.

³⁹ Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 88.

with certain first order desires, so he may find himself with second order desires; and just as he can see the first as worthless accidental determinations, in relation to which he is passive, so he can see the latter as passive and bereft of value.⁴⁰ Similarly, just as one can have first order desires with which he does not identify, so can he have second order desires with which he does not identify. Thus, upon waking up, Joe finds himself with a desire for his desire to eat sweets to be efficacious. Usually he only desires sweets, but this morning he also desires to desire sweets. However, just as Joe usually does not identify with his sweet tooth, that is, he does not value it, similarly, this morning, he does not identify with his corresponding second order desire. He wants to want sweets, despite himself, so to speak.⁴¹

It would not help to add higher order desires, namely, to suggest that Joe values eating sweets, if he also desires to desire to desire eating sweets; since the same difficulty will emerge at each level and, hence, infinite regress looms. Facing this problem, Frankfurt suggests that once a person “identifies himself decisively with one of his first-order desires, this commitment ‘resounds’ throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders.”⁴² However, as Gary Watson noted, what is doing the work here is not the notion of higher order desires but rather the capacity to identify with one of the desires; to be decisively committed to it. But this capacity is orthogonal to the notion of orders of desires.⁴³ Watson adds:

⁴⁰ For similar objections see, David Velleman, “What happens when someone acts,” *Mind* 101, no. 403 (1992): 471. Joseph Raz “The active and the passive.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 71 (1997): 211-246; Onora O’Neill, “Autonomy, coherence, and independence.” *Liberalism, Citizenship and Autonomy*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992): 205-208; and Samuel Scheffler, *Equality and Tradition*, Chapter 1.

⁴¹ Note that this does not mean that Joe necessarily has a second order desire against his desire for sweets. Nor does it mean that he has a third order desire not to desire to desire sweets. It just means that he may take the second order desire to desire sweets as a mere desire, rather than as an evaluative attitude. He is alienated from it just as he is usually alienated from his first order desire for sweets.

⁴² Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 91.

⁴³ An Alternative solution is that identification is reducible to the intensity of desire. Michael Smith thinks this is the only option for a Humean, and we saw in the previous section why this cannot work. See section 5.7 in *The Moral Problem*.

“[I]t is unclear why these acts of identification cannot be themselves of the first order—that is, identification with or commitment to course of action (rather than with or to desires)—in which case, no ascent is necessary, and the notion of higher-order volitions becomes superfluous or at least secondary.”⁴⁴

To free ourselves entirely from the lure of the notion that a second order desire is more ‘ours’ than a first one, consider the following case:

Charles loves reading books, and he likes spending hours contemplating poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings with friends in cafes. Now, it is also the case that Charles grew up in an environment that stressed, beyond anything else, the importance of one’s material well-being while denigrating and even ridiculing contemplation for the sake of contemplation. As a result, a materialistic second order desire was entrenched in him; that is, a desire to desire practical activities such as advancing one’s career and avoid desiring things that do not directly and clearly contribute to one’s material well-being. Contemplating sophisticated and abstract matters in cafes during the day is an undesirable activity, from the point of view of the materialistic second order desire. Now, assume that just before Charles starts college, his mother makes a fortune. As the sole inheritor of this money, the materialistic second order desire ceases to make sense to him; he sees no justification to avoid spending his days contemplating abstract ideas in cafes. Yet, the material second order desire is still well entrenched and still speaks against his contemplative desires.

Which desire is more Charles’ own? With which does he identify more? Which one is more valuable to him? Is it his first order contemplative desire or his second order materialistic desire? The answer seems clear in this case: It is the first rather than the latter. This case, then, demonstrates what we have already noted. Namely, that the notion of higher-order desire is

⁴⁴ Gary Watson, *Free Will*, 109.

tangential to the challenge of distinguishing between ends with which the agent identifies and ends with which he doesn't; and for this reason, it is also tangential to the challenge of ethical justification.

1.3.3 Identification as a Feeling

Neo-Humeans, I argued, must account for identification in terms of a relation the agent has to his desires. Furthermore, the relation cannot be borne out in terms of higher order desires, as Watson first noted and as Frankfurt later acknowledged.⁴⁵ In later writings, Frankfurt insists that he was right to tie the notion of identification with a complex structure of the will and specifically with a reflexive attitude, namely, an attitude that has, as an object, another attitude (specifically desire). If identification doesn't consist in orders of desires and their properties, perhaps, then, the relevant reflexive attitude is a kind of feeling one may have toward one's desires?⁴⁶

On this proposal, an end with which one identifies is an end in relation to which one has a special feeling—a feeling that it is one's *own* end; a feeling of identification. Whether distinctive feelings of this sort—unaided by judgment—exist is a contingent matter that must be decided empirically. But even if they do exist, they cannot, in themselves, account for identification since they appear to be neither necessary nor sufficient for identification. Thus, it seems implausible that paradigmatic cases of identification, like one's pursuit of one's

⁴⁵ Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness" in *The Importance of what we Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 159-177 and "Identification and Externality," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 58-69. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁴⁶ Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder propose an account of this sort. See Timothy Schroeder, and Nomy Arpaly. "Alienation and Externality," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (1999): 371-387. In section 1.2., I have provided a more detailed argument against the idea that what renders ends *valuable* are feelings and emotions. In this section I show more specifically, why feelings cannot account for identification.

family's well-being, are necessarily, or even typically, accompanied by a distinct feeling of identification. In such cases, it would seem absurd if one were to deny one's identification on the basis that one could not detect, at the moment, a certain feeling. Nor are feelings of identification a sufficient condition, since we may be alienated from the very feelings we have—even from our feeling of identification. Consider the following variants of Charles' case:

Recall that Charles was brought up in an environment that emphasized the importance of material success. Through this upbringing, a feeling of identification with materialistic ends, such as having a stable and lucrative job, became part of Charles character. In other words, he identified with those ends. Then, just before Charles starts college, his mother makes a fortune. As the sole inheritor of this money, materialistic desires cease to make sense to him, although he still has feelings of identification toward them. Since they make no sense to him, he now conceives of them as imposed on him and alien. He now takes his feeling of identifying with them to be indoctrinated and alien.

The lesson in Charles' case is that identification cannot be accounted for merely in terms of feelings. Just as in the case of desires, we may find within us feelings from which we are alienated, and if identification is just a feeling, then we may be alienated from it as well.

1.4 Identification as an Activity

We can trace the failures of the above psychologistic accounts of identification to a common root: All are based on psychologically given states and inclinations, in relation to which the agent is passive. Understood in this passive manner, the agent's psychological makeup constitutes an inventory of facts she finds within herself; as such, they are analogous to external facts that affect her. Therefore, identification cannot lie *merely* in passive psychological

determinations. Rather, it must reside in the agent's activity.⁴⁷ Thus, we saw that Charles is alienated from his materialistic desires and from his feelings and desires toward them; he takes them to be passive inclinations inculcated in him. By contrast, he is truly identified with activities determined by himself—like his *decision* to become a writer.

Notice that the active/passive distinction seems integral to the notion of identification. Being passive means that the agent is acted upon by something that is not, strictly speaking, the agent himself. Accordingly, a passive behavior is determined by factors external to the agent and, hence, it is not the agent's own; as such, it is a behavior from which the agent can be alienated. By contrast, where the agent is truly active, that is, self-determining rather than externally determined, there is nothing alienable. Therefore, understanding what renders the agent *truly active* seems to be a crucial step in accounting for identification. In the greater scheme of things, this means that a successful account of ethical justification must be one on which we value ends with which we *actively* identify. We should, therefore, ask what makes identification active?⁴⁸

Answering this question will ultimately lead us beyond the premises of neo-Humeanism and the psychologistic approach. Indeed, as we will see shortly, in trying to account for active identification even Frankfurt, normally a staunch neo-Humean, transcends the psychologistic bounds and forays into the existentialist realm when he advances the thesis

⁴⁷ The link between passivity and alienation has been noted by a number of contemporary philosophers. See, for example, Harry Frankfurt "Identification and Externality;" David Velleman, "What happens when someone acts;" Richard Moran "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life;" Joseph Raz "The active and the passive;" And Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*.

⁴⁸ The active/passive distinction is at the core of several traditions in ethics, most prominently the Aristotelian, the Kantian, and the existentialist tradition. In contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, Christine Korsgaard has made this distinction into the centerpiece of her work, drawing on the three mentioned historical traditions. For Kantian and existentialist influences, see *The Sources of Normativity*. Edited by Onora O'Neill. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): especially chapter 9. In later works, culminating in *Self-Constitution*, Korsgaard has incorporated also the Aristotelian notion of *substantive* activity.

that active identification resides in something like an existential decision (or choice).⁴⁹ On this proposal, we are truly active where we decide what ends to pursue (or what principles to endorse) in a way that is not determined by our desires and feelings.⁵⁰ Before we examine this existentialist proposal, we ought to inquire, more generally, what renders anything active? That is, what characterizes active behavior, as opposed to passive attitudes?

Frankfurt does not only consider the active/passive distinction crucial for our understanding of personhood, valuing and identification;⁵¹ he also sees his own work as endeavoring to recover this distinction to contemporary philosophy, which, he notes, has for some time generally neglected it.⁵² As a first step in amending this negligence, Frankfurt invokes an Aristotelian distinction between “events in a thing’s history [...] whose moving principle is inside the thing and those whose moving principle is outside. [...] a thing is active with respect to events whose moving principle is inside it, and passive with respect to events whose moving principle is outside it.”⁵³ Thus, a lioness pursuing its prey is acting on a principle that is internal to the kind of being she is, namely, a lion. Hence, hunting is her activity; she is active in hunting. On the other hand, a lioness free falling from an airplane is not acting on its internal principles of movement. The principle of free falling is external to the lioness qua lioness; falling is something that happens to her, not something she does; in free falling, she is a *patient* of a force external to her; i.e., she is passive.⁵⁴ The same seems to apply in the case of

⁴⁹ Late in his career, Frankfurt seems to have relinquished his existentialist notion of decision. See, *The Reasons for Love*, (Princeton University Press, 2009); in which Frankfurt locates valuing in a special value-conferring psychological attitude. i.e., love.

⁵⁰ See, Frankfurt’s “Identification and externality” and “Identification and Wholeheartedness.”

⁵¹ Frankfurt writes, “The difference between passivity and activity is at the heart of the fact that we exist as selves and agents and not merely as locales in which certain events happen to occur.” See, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) ix.

⁵² Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality,” 59.

⁵³ Frankfurt, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ To put it more accurately, we may say that the entire system of natural historical judgments of the species lion does not consist of free falling. Hence, falling from a plane is entirely accidental (and, hence, passive) for the lioness qua lion (e.g., a member of the species lion).

humans. Thus, when Dorothy is swept away by a tornado, she is not active but passively moved by the force of a storm; By the same token, Joseph, being sold to spice merchants by his jealous brothers, is not the agent of his traveling to Egypt, but rather, he is passively moved by the external force of conspiracy and trade.

So much is readily explicable in terms of neo-Humeanism. Neither Dorothy nor Joseph move according to their desired ends. Minimally, the neo-Humean maintains, one's activity must spring from one's desires and aim at one's desired ends. While this may work as a necessary condition for activity, it is insufficient. For, as we have seen, not all desires are active, hence, while it may be right that "acting on one's desired ends" is a principle of activity for human beings, it needs to be further determined so as to specify what desires are active and what are passive. But given their purely psychologistic framework, it is hard to see how neo-Humeans can account for principles that establish the distinction. Surely, the principles cannot be grounded in feelings or desires (of any order, constancy, or strength). These were shown above to be passive determinations; and passive psychological determinations cannot render other determinations active, as Frankfurt himself notes.⁵⁵ It will not help to appeal to other notions, like inclinations, habits, cares, or even *love*, as long as they are understood as mere psychological determinations;⁵⁶ nor will it help to seek purely psychological determinations that are *necessary* (rather than contingent) for the agent or natural to human beings.⁵⁷ As long as we conceive of necessity and nature in merely empirical psychological

⁵⁵ Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 66.

⁵⁶ Frankfurt appeals to love as the source of what we value in *The Reasons of Love*. The objects of our love determine what ends are valuable for us. I do not discuss his proposal here because Frankfurt's conception of love is purely psychologistic and, hence, it is subject to the same criticism I leveled against his other psychologistic proposals.

⁵⁷ Note that any account that turns on the notion of necessity diverges, in important respects, from David Hume's heritage, in which necessity has no place and it is explained away by appealing, instead, to regularities. Hume's own attempt to account for the distinction between activity and passivity is in terms of psychological regularity. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd edition revised by P. H. Nidditch, (Oxford:

terms, they may be alien from the agential point of view. Thus, even if it turns out that cruelty is an inborn inclination in human beings and that it cannot be truly eradicated, an agent may see his own inclination for cruelty as alien, that is, as an intrusion of an external force. Moreover, knowing that this inclination is ‘natural’ (in the empiricist sense of the notion)⁵⁸ and unavoidable may only lead the agent to resent his own nature and seek (or pray for) a transfiguration.

The above considerations lead to the following demand: An account of active identification must not consist in purely psychologistic terms. Recognizing this demand is tantamount to recognizing that an account of active identification is impossible within the neo-Humean framework. For neo-Humeanism is defined by its commitment to one’s psychology being the ultimate source of one’s ends and attitudes. Considered from a vantage point of this dissertation, what is a dead end for neo-Humeanism and psychologism is the point of departure for two other positions: Value-existentialism and value-essentialism. The first posits a non-psychological faculty of active identification, and the latter holds that some principles are internal by virtue of our nature (e.g., as human beings, or as rational agents). To see how the rejection of neo-Humeanism leads to either of the aforementioned positions, I shall consider Frankfurt’s final attempt to account for ethical justification, which turns on a notion of decision understood as pure activity. His conception of decision, as we shall see, stretches the limits of neo-Humeanism and makes forays into existentialist territories.

Clarendon Press, 1975): section 8. Regularity of passive psychological determinations clearly cannot solve the difficulties at hand. We have rejected a similar idea in section 1.2 where we discussed constant desires and feelings.

⁵⁸ By an empiricist conception of ‘natural’, I mean one that conceives of nature in terms of non-teleological universal laws (or regularities). On this conception, saying that an inclination is natural may either mean that it is statistically common, or that it is necessitated by a law of nature (say, by some constraint of our genome). ‘Natural’ can also be meant in an Aristotelian manner, in which it does have a teleological-normative aspect. I will consider this notion of nature presently.

On Frankfurt's account, "[d]ecisions, unlike desires or attitudes, do not seem to be susceptible both to internality and to externality."⁵⁹ Accordingly, decision avoids the equivocation of passivity and activity to which other attitudes and desires are prone; this means that while other attitudes are only accidentally activities (this means, they are active rather than passive by virtue of something external to them), decision is active by its very nature.⁶⁰ By deciding, I'm actively identifying myself with an end, rather than passively acknowledging identification that I feel or have. "The decision determines what the person really wants, by making the desire on which he decides fully his own."⁶¹

Now, if decision is an activity, it follows that it is determined by principles internal to the agent, as Frankfurt himself notes. Therefore, he must be able to explain in what sense decisions, unlike other attitudes and desires, are essentially determined by the agent's own principles. His answer is that in deciding, the agent "*constitutes himself*"; namely, in this act he creates "a self out of the raw material of inner life." This means that decision determines "the intrapsychic constraints and boundaries with respect to which a person's autonomy may be threatened, even by his own desires." Appealing to the aforementioned Aristotelian distinction between activity and passivity, Frankfurt adds that what makes an event (even a psychic one) active is that the "agent has constituted himself to include it." This suggests that, in deciding, the agent does not rely on *any* preexisting principles. Rather, decision is the act of establishing what is intrinsic to the agent.⁶²

⁵⁹ Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 68.

⁶⁰ Decision, hence, is not another attitude we may have in relation to our desires, rather it "is something we do to ourselves." Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 170-172.

⁶¹ Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 170. Frankfurt continues: "To this extent, the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, *constitutes himself*. The pertinent desire is no longer in any way external to him. It is not desire that he "has" merely as a subject in whose history it happens to occur, as a person may "have" an involuntary spasm that happens to occur in the history of his body. It comes to be a desire that is incorporated into him by virtue of the fact that he has it *by his own will*."

⁶² Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 68-72.

Against the background of the dead-end to which neo-Humeanism has arrived, this characterization of decision seems to follow by necessity. For neo-Humeans have no means of accounting for internal active principles, and hence, if ‘decision’ were to draw on any preexisting principles, it would be passive (since the principles rest in psychological passive elements). However, if decision is *not* based on internal principles, it becomes wholly unclear in what sense it is *active*. Indeed, decision seems clearly non-active if activity must be based in internal principles. We arrive again at a dead end. If decisions are active self-constitutive acts, it follows that they must consist in internal principles. But if the principles in which decisions consist are internal, it must be because they are the products of previous decisions (otherwise the principles are merely psychological alienated determinations).⁶³ This will either yield an infinite regress of prior decisions or will entail that decision is, after all, not active. What we have arrived at is a version of what is sometimes called the “dilemma of self-constitution.”⁶⁴

Either decision consists in internal principles or not:

- a. If decision doesn’t consist in internal principles, then it is not active.
- b. If decision consists in internal principles, then an infinite regress of prior decisions is generated.⁶⁵

⁶³ Note that existential decision (or choice) must always hold in the present. Taken as a past event it does not render the object of decision active; rather it is another fact about the agent, namely, that in the past he has decided so and so. Hence, when I here say that internal principles are “products of previous decisions,” what I mean, strictly speaking, is that these decisions still hold in the present.

⁶⁴ For a variant of this paradox see Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 20.

⁶⁵ A defender of the neo-Humean account of decision may point out that Frankfurt does propose principles constitutive of decision. The aim of decision, its principle, that in virtue of which it is a decision, he suggests, “is to resolve conflict or to avoid it;” by deciding, one aims at harmonizing or integrating one’s self. By identifying with some desires and by rejecting others one constitutes one’s own self as harmonious. I have not taken this part of Frankfurt’s account into consideration in this chapter for two reasons: First, if decision has an aim, a principle, it means that by deciding one has at least one standing principle of action: The principle of integrating himself. But, to my knowledge, nowhere does Frankfurt explain why this principle is *internal* and active in a way that will render decision active. Indeed, given our discussion, qua neo-Humean, he cannot provide such an account. Second, the idea that a principle such as ‘integration’ or ‘making coherent’ or ‘harmonizing’ can serve to distinguish between mere-desired ends and valuable ends is considered in depth in the next chapter.

1.5 The Fork: Between Existentialism and Essentialism

While the dilemma of self-constitution is insurmountable for neo-Humeans, by denying either of the horns, two new paths are opened. The denial of the first horn, namely, that to be active, decision requires internal principles, leads to value-existentialism; namely, the view that human beings possess a special faculty of purely active decision (or choice) by virtue of which we identify with ends (and, hence, value them). The denial of the second horn, namely, that having internal principles requires a prior decision, leads to value-essentialism; which is the view that some principles are internal by virtue of our nature (e.g., as human beings, or as rational agents); and, importantly, they are internal prior to and independent of any decision we can make. I shall first argue that value-existentialism eventuates in an absurd position in our context, on which the agent identifies with ends that are arbitrary from her own viewpoint. Then, I will discuss essentialism.

1.5.1 Value-Existentialism

The existentialist rejects the claim that one's activity consists in internal principles. Existential decision (or choice), the purest act of the agent—an act that is wholly the agent's own—does not consist in internal principles. Decision, in its purest and inalienable sense, consists in no preexisting facts or states, including principles, internal or external. It is a pure act of the agent; one by virtue of which the agent can have ends with which he truly identifies.⁶⁶ To understand

⁶⁶ Frankfurt develops a position of this kind in his "Identification and Externality." Existentialist aspects can also be found in Christine Korsgaard's discussion of practical identities. See, Christine Korsgaard. *The Sources of Normativity*, 232-239. Such views are often associated with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library 1956). However, it would be a mistake to associate it with Heidegger's existentialism. For Heidegger, Dasein's being is such that is constituted through care. Accordingly,

what a pure decision may look like, consider Charles' case: Suppose that despite his second order desires and his feelings of identification with materialistic desires, Charles decides to turn his back on them and to become a writer. This decision is active in the relevant sense and inalienable only if it is not determined by any of his desires, feelings, or principles. Hence, if Charles decides to be a writer because he enjoys writing and the activities associated with it, then his decision is impure and alienable: For it is determined by inclinations he happens to have, rather than one he *decided* to have. Pure decision must not be determined by any kind of existing desires, inclinations, preferences, or principles; these cannot be its determinants.⁶⁷

I shall now argue that the existentialist account fails because it ignores the essential *rational* dimension of identification. According to the existentialist, as we have just noted, one is purely active when one purely decides; namely, when one's decision is based on no considerations external to it, including justifications. It follows that in purely acting, namely in deciding, one is acting for *no justification at all*.⁶⁸ Acting for no justification means that the agent doesn't know why she decided whatever she did and, hence, also not why she acted as she did.

qua Dasein, I conceive of the ends I pursue through the lenses of care—rather than as empirical determinations; i.e., as facts. To see my ends and commitments like the facts that hold of other beings, is a state of fallen-ness; of understanding myself in terms of beings that are not Dasein. M. Heidegger, 1962. *Being and Time*. Tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, p. 85. Hence, the notion of pure decision, as I have defined it, is foreign to Heidegger's thought. As Dasein, my activities are always already saturated with care and any choice that is mine is taken from within the realm of care. There is no standpoint, outside of this realm, from which I can render anything my own through pure decision (or choice). As opposed to Heidegger's line of existentialism, Sartre, at times, does seem to advance a conception of choice close to the one I have characterized. See for example *Existentialism is a Humanism*. translated by C. Macomber (Yale University Press, 2007): Especially, 51-54.

It should be noted that although, as I have noted, Frankfurt's own view sometimes seems rather existential, he is well aware of the difficulties of this position. He writes: "A person's will is real only if its character is not absolutely up to him. It must be unresponsive to his sheer fiat" See, Frankfurt "The faintest passion." *The American Philosophical Association Centennial Series* (2013): 59-72. In his later work Frankfurt distances himself from the importance of decision (existentially understood) and stresses in its stead the importance of what we care about and love. See "the importance of what we care about" and *The Reasons of Love*.

⁶⁷ It is important to note that the existentialist does not argue that desires, feelings, and principles cannot inform my choice. They surely can, but *only where* I choose them as mine, or I choose them as valuable. Prior to such a choice they are mere facticity.

⁶⁸ Again, I can choose certain considerations (desires, feelings, etc.) as reasons, but they are such only by virtue of my choice.

But isn't it absurd to suppose that activities with which the agent *truly identifies* are ones she does for no reason and cannot justify? Thus, say that we learn that Charles decided to pursue a literary career for *no* reason at all. This would seem like he had been possessed by an external force, rather than as a paradigmatic case of true agential activity and identification. Imagine that upon asking him why he decided to be a writer, he retorts "for no reason at all and from no desire of mine. Just because I decided to!" But then, in what sense is deciding Charles' own activity and not a passive determination, similar to a compulsive determination?⁶⁹ If it is his activity at all, it seems like the activity most alienated and most obscure from his viewpoint; an activity even he is not able to shed light on, akin to one determined by a throw of dice.

We conclude, therefore, that existentialism fails to account for active identification because it fundamentally denies the rational dimension of active identification; namely, that in identifying, we see some justification to pursue the end with which we identify.

1.5.2 Value-Essentialism

While the existentialist denies the claim of the first horn of the self-constitution dilemma, the essentialist rejects the second, namely, she rejects the claim that having internal principles requires that the agent has already made decisions about what principles are internal to her. On this view an agent has principles with which she cannot help *but* identify, since they are essential to what she is; they constitute her nature. Now, clearly 'nature' here must denote

⁶⁹ An existentialist thinker might argue against this point by noting that while pure decision is pure it has, as its object, ends the agent has reasons to act on. To use a classical example, one needs to choose between attending one's lonely mother and joining the resistance. Now, surely, one has reasons to pursue *either* route. However, ultimately, one needs to choose between them and, as Sartre famously claimed, only in choosing, one makes the path chosen one's own. This respond, however, cannot resolve the difficulty I was pointing to. For while, in some sense, it may be true that once the path is chosen, one indeed acts on reasons (e.g., to save France), it still holds that the very act of choosing is done for no reason at all. See Sartre, *Existentialism as Humanism*, 30-32.

something quite different from mere (efficient) causal necessity or mere regularities. We have already seen earlier that we cannot explain what principles are internal, just in terms of empirical necessities. Thus, that I'm necessarily pulled down by earth's gravity, does not make earth's gravity a principle I identify with.⁷⁰ Essentialism maintains that there are principles (or ends) that belong to my nature not in the sense that I'm necessarily subject to them, but rather that they are *mine* by virtue of my *nature*; that is, they are mine independently of mere psychological determinations or decisions I have made. In other words, on this view, what accounts for active identification are principles with which I actively identify qua the *kind* of being I am.

Essentialism inhabits a logical space between psychologism and existentialism. While the first consists in the agent's particular, merely empirical, determinations and the latter excludes any determinations as irrelevant, essentialism is based in the notion that qua a certain kind of being, certain principles belong to the agent. This middle position promises to overcome, on the one hand, the passivity of all psychologistic accounts and, on the other hand, the utter emptiness and arbitrariness of existentialism. Now, to see what we mean by principles that are one's own by virtue of one's nature, it is useful to consider the case of non-rational living nature. As we have seen before, the activity of hunting is the lioness' own, by virtue of her nature, namely, by being a member of her species. Unlike earth's gravity, of which the lioness is a patient, she is the agent of activities that spring from her nature. If the species 'lion' determines what principles are the lioness' own, what is the kind that explains what principles belong to us qua agents? In other words, if the agent, qua the *kind* of being it is, actively identifies with certain principles, what can be the identification-fixing *kind*?

⁷⁰ For a similar point see D. Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action." *The Philosophical Review* 115, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 188.

Essentialist accounts vary in the way they answer this question. For some, the relevant kind is human beings,⁷¹ for others a certain tradition, culture, or practice, and still others consider the relevant kind to be rational animal or rational being.⁷² All of these accounts share a similar challenge: They ought to explain why the agent actively identifies with the principles prescribed by the kind to which she belongs. As I will argue shortly, most essentialist accounts fail to meet this challenge. But, before I elaborate on the challenge and lay out my criticism, a clarification is in order.

The contemporary literature on what I have called essentialist accounts does not typically concern the question of identification (at least not directly); rather it concerns, typically, the question of values or normative reasons (justifications). Most essentialist accounts seek to establish what principles (ends) are valuable for agents, or are a source of justifications for agents, by virtue of the agents' nature. Thus, Alasdair MacIntyre submits that qua human beings, ends like friendship are valuable for us;⁷³ and Michael Smith argues that, as rational agents, it is valuable for us not to interfere with our (and other agents') capacity for realizing desires and forming beliefs.⁷⁴ Hence, that I consider such accounts as relevant for identification may seem somewhat contrived. However, we have seen earlier in this chapter that valuable ends must be considered by the agent not merely as given (e.g., mere psychological determinations), but rather such that he actively identifies with. While our discussion concerned mostly neo-Humean accounts, the same considerations hold for

⁷¹ See for example, MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Judith Jarvis Thomson *Normativity* (Open Court, 2015) and Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

⁷² See, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, Michael Smith "the magic of constitutivism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2):187-200 (2015); Michael Smith "A constitutivist theory of reasons: Its promise and parts." *Law, Ethics and Philosophy* 1 (2013): 9-30. D. Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason." *Ethics* 106, no. 4 (July 1, 1996): 694-726., and D. Velleman, *How We Get Along* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷³ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

⁷⁴ Smith, "Constitutive Theory of Reasons: Its Promise and Its Parts," 22-27.

essentialist accounts, with some modifications. Indeed, the main objection leveled against essentialism in contemporary literature is that it is not clear why the agent *identifies* (or cares) about the principles or ends that are prescribed by the kind to which the agent belongs.⁷⁵ In other words, it is not enough to show that certain kinds consist of intrinsic normative principles; rather, essentialism must show that by virtue of belonging to such a kind, the agent actively identifies with these principles.

Thus, consider the case of Samson, who is a professional basketball player. There are a number of principles and rules constitutive for basketball (as played professionally), including what counts as properly sized balls and courts, the laws of fair play, and the method of keeping the score. It also includes the constitutive aim of winning the game. As a basketball player, Samson aims at winning games. However, he does not care for this aspect of the game; indeed, he dislikes the anxiety and competitiveness it enjoins, and he is also averse to inflicting the pain of loss on his rivals. We may say, then, that he does not identify (and, hence, value) what is constitutively valuable in the game of basketball. Now, importantly, Samson does not dispute that winning is an end constitutive of basketball. Rather, he doesn't value this end because he does not *identify* with this aspect of the game; it is alien to him. We see, then, that although he is a member of the kind "professional basketball player" he does not identify with the constitutive end of this kind, namely, aiming at victory. Samson's case, therefore, undermines the link between belonging to a kind and identifying with the constitutive normative (or valuable) principles (or ends) of the kind.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See, Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency" and "Shmagency revisited" In *New waves in metaethics* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011): 208-233.

. For responds see, Velleman *How We Get Along*, 138-142, Michael Smith, "the magic of constitutivism," 19. Luca Ferrero, "Constitutivism and the Inescapability of Agency." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 4 (2009): 303-333.

⁷⁶ This kind of criticism rests, as I noted before, on identification being an essential part of valuing.

In response, the defender of essentialism will remind us that not everything is a game; and games are not the ‘kinds’ we should focus on in trying to account for what principles are intrinsic to agents as such. The first thing to note is that we can *stop* playing games; and we can step back from playing a game to a position from which we can either identify with it or be alienated from it. But, arguably, we cannot stop being humans or agents (to take two examples); and for that reason, we cannot step back from agency or human life in a way that makes alienation possible for us. Thus, returning to Samson, the reason he can reject basketball’s constitutive aim is tied with the fact that he is not *only* a basketball player. Or put differently, what *he is*, is not a basketball player. For he is also a communal activist, a fan of Balkan music, an advocate for animal rights and Dalilah’s lover (we may say that, in general, he has a life). Importantly, it is by virtue of being more than merely a basketball player, that Samson can step back from the practice of basketball playing and reflect on whether or not he identifies with the various aspects of the game. In other words, he possesses a vantage point from which he can evaluate specific practices and their constitutive aims and principles.

By opposition, the essentialist submits that there are kinds to which we (i.e., agents or humans) belong and from which we cannot step back; kinds that are *constitutive* of who (or what) we are. And since we cannot step back, we cannot become alienated from the principles that are constitutive of such kinds; for there is no standpoint outside such kinds that we can inhabit and from which we can consider whether we value or identify with the principles constitutive of the kind. Just like the lioness cannot help but be a lioness, the essentialist holds that we cannot help *but* be the kind of being we are (e.g., rational agents or human beings). Just like the lioness cannot step back from the activities essential for lions and consider their worth, so we cannot abandon the intrinsic principles constitutive of rational agency or

humanity and assess them from the outside.⁷⁷ The lioness is what it is only within the space of activities delineated by the system of natural historical judgments that constitutes her species (lions); she cannot help *but* act (or fail to act) in a lioness manner. By the same token, as rational agents or humans we cannot help *but* identify with the principles constitutive of rational agency or humanity; these principles are *inescapable* for us.⁷⁸

However, inescapability may not be the right strategy to establish that we identify with principles that are constitutive to our kind. David Enoch proposes the following skeptical line: “Perhaps [...] I cannot opt out of the game of agency, but I can certainly play it half-heartedly, indeed under protest, without accepting the aims purportedly constitutive of it as mine.”⁷⁹ Even if, unlike the game of basketball, “the game of agency” is inescapable, it still doesn’t render its constitutive principles *my own*. That I’m bound to “play” by these principles and pursue the aims they prescribe is still compatible with their being *alien* to me. Or in other words, that I must be an agent or a human being still does not entail that I identify with the constitutive principles of agency or humanity. I may see my constitutive aims as Sisyphean and pursue them begrudgingly or with resignation.

Enoch maintains that this argument merits the rejection of essentialism in general. We cannot infer that we identify with certain ends and principles from our nature. The fact of our being agents does not, in and of itself, determine that we identify with principles constitutive for agency. To identify (or value) these principles, Enoch claims, we must also have a reason, or better, a *justification* to be agents. And this further justification cannot itself stem from the

⁷⁷ Foot *Natural Goodness*, Chapter 1. See also, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, Chapters 1-2.

⁷⁸ The inescapability strategy is suggested by Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, Chapter 1 and David Velleman *How we get Along*, 138-142.

⁷⁹ Enoch, “Agency, Shmagency,” 188.

nature of agency or humanity, on pain of regress.⁸⁰ More generally, we may say that whatever notion of nature we endorse, and whatever principles are constitutive of this notion of nature, they are our own only if we see them as justified. This conclusion resonates with the conclusion we arrived at in our discussion of value-existentialism. In both cases, we saw that for beings like us, active identification consists in justification. And bereft of justification, concepts like decision or nature cannot account for our actively identifying with ends.

1.6 Identification and Rationality

We turned to value-existentialism and value-essentialism in order to overcome the impasse presented by the dilemma of self-constitution. Each of these positions rests in a rejection of one horn of the dilemma. Existentialists deny that active identification (and specifically decision or choice) stems from principles internal to the agent. Essentialists deny that internal principles must be either merely psychological or the outcome of decision (or choice). Having seen that both positions are subject to serious criticism, I would like to generalize the difficulties we have encountered in this chapter. Common to all the accounts considered in this chapter is that they do not consist in justification. Be the identification-making element as it may—desires, second order desires, feelings of identification, decision (existential or otherwise), or principles constitutive of our nature—as long as the agent doesn't have justification for holding it, it isn't truly hers; She cannot truly identify with it; it is *given* to her; it is not her own. For the kind of beings we are, acting without knowing why we act in the way we do, is a case of alienation.

⁸⁰ I believe this criticism holds unless agency or humanity mean something like rational agency. In the next section, I will argue that rational nature (or rational agency) allows essentialists to cope with Enoch's argument.

In noting the importance of justification, we should not forgo the earlier insight that identification must be active rather than passive; instead, we should seek an account that unites both insights: Identification must consist in activity understood in terms of justification. Richard Moran's influential work on identification has made this insight into the centerpiece of his account. Desires with which one identifies must be justified and, in being justified, desires are not merely passive-given-psychological states the agent finds in herself, rather, they are active—she is active in holding them. Consider Charles' case again: We noted that he is alienated from his materialistic desires, as long as he sees no justifications for having them, and he sees none, given his excellent financial situation. Now, say that Charles loses all his savings. In this case, he again sees a point in his materialistic desires—he can justify them. Having them is no longer something he merely finds in himself—an alien, dead habit. Rather, now he holds them actively through conceiving of justifications for having them. Identification, we see, has a rational dimension.

While this rational account of identification holds promise, if we adhere to the neo-Humean framework, it seems plainly untenable. For recall that, according to the neo-Humean theory of reasons, all justifications stem from desires. But haven't we seen in previous sections that desires (or other merely psychological determinations), considered in themselves, are passive and alienable? And, if so, how could justifications that arise from passive and alienable states (desires) be the source of one's identification with ends?⁸¹

To fully grasp the difficulty at hand, it is worth considering forms of neo-Humeanism that might appear to overcome it. While David Hume restricted reasons to instrumental ones,

⁸¹ In this connection, Joseph Raz writes "If a desire's being really mine depends on another desire of mine can the second desire determine the fate of the first even if it is itself not really mine?", See Raz, "The Passive and the Active," 225.

namely, reasons that guide the agent to take means to satisfy ends given by his desires, some neo-Humeans, like Bernard Williams, hold that reasons can also establish *ends*, with the caveat that these reasons stem from the agent's set of desires.⁸² Thus, I don't only have instrumental reasons that guide me in how to accomplish my end of mowing my friend's lawn; rather, I also have reasons for holding this end (e.g., "I should mow the lawn because it helps my friend" or "because this is what friends do for each other"). This variant of Humeanism appears to account for ends that are not merely passively given but rather justified and, hence, active ends, and therefore it seems to satisfy the *rational* dimension of identification, for it affords a conception of justified ends.

But, this is only an apparent solution to the difficulty at hand. For even on this view, recall, all reasons, including those that justify ends, stem from the agent's desires (or his subjective motivational set, namely, his SMS), and these desires are not rational but merely psychologically and *passively* given. Thus, while it is true that I have reasons for mowing my friend's lawn, these reasons spring from ends I desire for *no further reasons*, like "to help my friends" or "to have friends." Rather than solving the difficulty, then, the difficulty is pushed up the stream to the psychological springs of justifications. Since these springs are still *non-justified desires*, we again encounter the difficulty: How can non-justified passive states be the source of ends with which we *actively* identify? The fact that our desires can provide reasons for other ends down the stream does not seem to bear on the difficulty at hand.⁸³

⁸² Other prominent neo-Humeans who hold such a view are Sharon Street and Michael Smith. Some variants of the view, including Williams', consider as sources of justifications not only desires, but also other psychological states, like emotions. This does not matter in the context of our discussion because, as we have seen, all are similarly passive, if they are non-justified. We shall discuss their views in the next chapter.

⁸³ Another way to frame this discussion is to ask: Can we deliberate about final ends? Humeanism seems to entail a negative answer. For final ends, i.e., ends not pursued for the sake of other ends, are given by desires. Henry Richardson claims that we can deliberate on final ends, and some neo-Humeans, like Mark Schroeder, hold that his account is relevant to a Humean framework. However, in the context of our discussion, Richardson's account cannot save Humeanism. For even on his account, deliberation presupposes given final

We see, then, that neo-Humeanism cannot account for what renders identification justified. It is also clear that existentialism cannot account for justification in the relevant sense. Because, as we have seen, existential decisions fail to be active because of their arbitrariness and, hence, they cannot constitute the source of justification. Our discussion of essentialism pointed to the same direction: Principles constitutive of our nature cannot be the source of justification since such principles are our own only if justified. Thus, Enoch argues, one identifies with the principles constitutive for agency only if one sees justification for being an agent. Hence, the kind of internal principles essentialist accounts propose cannot be the source of justification since they must presuppose another source of justification.⁸⁴

However, this line of criticism leaves logical space for a special kind of essentialism, as I will show. For, saying that for creatures like us identification consists in justification is tantamount to saying that we are rational creatures; that is, that we identify with what we consider *justified*. But this means that if rationality (understood as the capacity to justify), as such, entails that certain principles are justified then it follows that we identify them (and with ends they prescribe) by virtue of our rational nature. I shall call this special kind of essentialism,

valuable ends, which serve as the springs of justification. On his account, in the process of deliberation, we can specify the content of a final end by taking into consideration other ends of ours. Thus, if I have the final end of providing my children with a good education, the content of ‘good education’ can be specified through considering other ends. However, this does not touch on the crucial point, namely, that we have no justification for the final ends to which we appeal in specifying our ends. In a neo-Humean context, these final ends remain unjustified desires.

⁸⁴ Enoch saw this conclusion as supporting a realist metanormative position on which the source of normative reason is in normative facts. It is only by virtue of normative facts that we have normative reasons. See “Agency, Shmagency.” 194-196. Enoch develops his own “robust realism” metaethics in Enoch, David. *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2011).

rationalism (or more accurately, value-rationalism), since it aspires to derive the principles with which we identify (and, hence, what we subjectively value) from our rational nature.

Importantly, an opponent of essentialism, such as Enoch, may try to reapply his former line of criticism to value-rationalism; namely, he may argue that we identify with principles constitutive for rational nature, only if these principles (and our rational nature) are *justified*, in the same manner as before he required a justification for being an agent. However, this argument cannot be applied to value-rationalism because the very point of value-rationalism is that there are justifications that follow from the very capacity for justifying. Hence, if an agent is the kind of agent who (like Enoch assumes) identifies with justified ends, it follows that it is an agent with the capacity for justification; and if any principles are justified *by virtue* of the capacity for justification, it follows that this kind of agent sees these principles as justified. Accordingly, rather than being an objection, the requirement that constitutive principles be justified speaks in favor of principles prescribed by value-rationalism. Now, that such principles indeed exist, and that they can render ends our own (and hence valuable), I still haven't shown. This is the task of the next chapter in which I consider and criticize value-rationalist accounts. My point here is only to note that, unlike other forms of essentialism, value-rationalism, if intelligible, can withstand the above line of criticism.

2

Critique of Value-Formalism

2.1 Introduction: From Value-Rationalism to Value Formalism

The first chapter constitutes an argument in favor of *value-rationalism*, namely, for accounts on which ethical justification consists in rationality, rather than in the agent's psychology, existentialist choice, or non-rational essence. For creatures like us, actively identifying with an end (and, hence, valuing it) consists in seeing justifications for holding this end. But what is the nature of justification by which ends are valuable? What characterizes ethical justification?

In answering these questions, value rationalist accounts are divided into *substantive* and *formal* camps. Substantive value-rationalists maintain that reason is substantive, namely, that there are ends or practices that are rational by virtue of their content, like friendship or the well-being of one's family.¹ On this view, a failure to value valuable ends is a case of irrationality. Accordingly, if someone fails to see, for example, the value of friendship, then she is rationally criticizable. Importantly, rational contents, as such, do not require further ethical justification; rather, they are the source of evaluative justifications—namely, they ground the justification of other ends.² By contrast, formal value-rationalists hold that reason is formal and, hence, that what ethically justifies ends are formal rational principles.³

¹ Among the dominant contemporary philosophers who belong to this school are Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*; Quinn, "Putting Rationality in its Place" and Scanlon *What We Owe to Each other*.)

² It is crucial to recall the distinction I drew in the introduction between ethical and evaluative justifications. 'Evaluative justification' refers to any justification that renders contents (i.e., ends and means) valuable. By 'ethical justification' I refer specifically to evaluative justification that renders ends valuable in themselves, rather than valuable merely by virtue of other valuable ends. Justification is "merely evaluative" when it renders contents valuable merely by virtue of other ends, as in the case of means that are valuable *only* calculatively, namely, by virtue of furthering a valuable end.

³ To be sure, the notion of form is not always used in ethics (and metaphysics) in the way I've just used it, namely, in contrast to content. It is sometimes used, in an Aristotelian fashion, to denote the essential or constitutive features of certain beings. Used in this essential way, we can speak of the essential (or substantive)

This chapter will concern value-formalist accounts. The reason I will not discuss substantive value-rationalism has been given in the introduction. I noted that since the purpose of the dissertation is to account for the distinction between valuable and non-valuable ends, I will not discuss theories that mark the distinction by appealing to a special faculty, such as moral or rational intuition, conscience, or *synderesis*. In assuming such faculties, what is accounted for is not the difference that renders ends valuable or not, but rather the difference in the faculty by which ends are acquired. Substantive value-rationalism does not explain the difference between rational (and, hence, valuable) ends and non-rational ones, namely, what in the content or form of such ends renders them valuable. Rather, from the agential viewpoint what marks an end as rational is the faculty through which it has been obtained. Hence, substantive value-rationalism does not belong to the dialectic of my investigation,⁴ and it is for that reason that the kind of value-rationalism that is pertinent to this work is *value-formalism*.

Given the subject of this chapter, I should first clarify what I mean by the form-content distinction. By ‘content’, I designate the constituents of elementary propositions (names and predicates). Accordingly, ends and means are *contents*. By contrast, ‘form’ designates whatever isn’t part of the elementary proposition, like logical connectors, quantifiers, and rules of inference. Given these definitions, evaluative justification is contentful, where an end is rendered justified by virtue of the value of another end or means. Thus, “mowing Molly’s lawn” is contentfully justified, if it is valuable because it instantiates or furthers another valuable end, such as the end of being friends with Molly. By opposition,

form of the oak tree. Thus, the form of the oak tree consists of a system of natural historical judgments like “oak trees grow leaves,” or “oak trees grow acorns.” Understood in this way, form, as we have seen in the example of the oak, can be *contentful*. It can consist of ends (and means) constitutive of certain beings. As such, form does not stand in contrast to content. For that reason, it cannot be the notion of form relevant to value-formalists, since in their view justification must not reside in content.

⁴ It should be noted that a failure of this dissertation to account in any way for the distinction between valuable and non-valuable ends would serve as a *reductio* argument in favor of substantive rationalism.

“mowing Molly’s lawn” is formally justified, for example, if it is valuable because it is universalizable.⁵

Now, as I noted above, value formalism designates any theory in which what renders ends valuable rather than merely desired—i.e., what ethically justifies ends—is a formal rational principle. I call such principles the *principles of construction*. We can specify, accordingly, three basic elements shared by every value-formalist account:⁶

1. The base of construction: The agent’s subjective motivational set (SMS), or a subset thereof, from which evaluative judgments are constructed.
2. The principle of construction: A formal rational principle by virtue of which members of one’s SMS are rendered valuable. This principle functions in value-formalism as ethical justification.
3. Ethical judgments: the judgments that result from the application of the principle of construction to the base of construction. The objects of such judgments are valuable ends, practices or maxims that are justified by the principle of construction, given the SMS.

Value formalists conceive of the unity of these three elements in procedural or functional terms. Thus, they understand ethical judgments to be the outcome of the procedure of applying the principle of construction to the base of construction. Or, alternatively: they see

⁵ For a similar characterization see Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 47-49.

⁶ Cf. C. Bagnoli, ed. *Constructivism in Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013): 1-22; also, see, J. Lenman, Y. Shemmer, eds. *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2012): Introduction.

the principle of construction as a function whose argument is the basis of construction and whose value is a set of evaluative judgments.⁷⁸

At the heart of every value-formalist account lies the formal principle that functions as an ethical justification, namely, the principle of construction. To function successfully as ethical justifications, principles of construction must meet two fundamental requirements, which I will first state and then explicate:

1. The Distinction Requirement: A principle of construction ought to distinguish between what is a merely desired end (e.g., a whim or a compulsion) and what is valuable.
2. The Evaluative Requirement: A principle of construction must be evaluatively relevant.

The distinction requirement is almost self-explanatory. Since the function of principles of construction is to distinguish between merely desired ends and valuable ends, they must be

⁷ This much is common to value formalist accounts, but they can differ significantly in respect to each of the elements. Thus, psychologistic value formalists (like Allen Gibbard and Michael Smith) differ from constructivist value formalists (Sharon Street and Christine Korsgaard) in how they conceive of the base of construction. While psychologistic accounts consider it as itself lacking any evaluative valence (mere psychological attitudes), constructivists see the base of construction as already being evaluative in some sense (I shall return to this distinction in section 2.4, when I discuss the formalist dilemma). Neo-Kantian and neo-Humean constructivists are divided as to the way they conceive of ethical judgments. While neo-Kantians hold that ethical judgments are a priori and, hence, hold universally, neo-Humeans view ethical judgments as contingent upon one's SMS and varying among agents and cultures.

⁸ To get the scope of this chapter in focus, it is important to note a type of neo-Humean account that bears most of the characteristics of value-formalism but shall not interest us here. In this type of neo-Humeanism, formal rational principles render ends valuable by linking them rationally to ends provided by one's SMS. Most commonly, these formal principles are calculative and instantiating principles and, accordingly, ends are valuable if they either further or instantiate one's desired ends. Thus, whether I should drink the glass of gin I hold, namely, whether drinking the gin is valuable, is determined by whether it furthers or instantiates ends that are among my SMS (e.g., "getting drunk"). But this kind of evaluative justification presupposes that one's SMS provides valuable ends, and this is exactly what neo-Humeans *cannot* presuppose; as the discussion of the previous chapter has shown. In other words, in this type of neo-Humeanism, rational principles function as evaluative justifications but not as *ethical* justifications; and the task of this dissertation is to account for ethical justifications. It is for that reason that very prominent neo-Humean accounts, such as Bernard Williams', shall not be discussed in this chapter. The only accounts I will discuss here are those in which formal principles render ends (or maxims) valuable in themselves, and not *merely* by virtue of other ends. And only such accounts I will call value-formalist.

able to mark a *distinction* between ends. Now, not all formal principles can make such a distinction. Thus, since every end is identical to itself, the formal principle known as the “law of identity” cannot mark differences between ends and, hence, cannot function as a principle of construction. In section 2.2, I argue against two of the most influential contemporary value-formalist accounts (Sharon Street’s and various forms of neo-Kantianism) by showing that the principle of construction they employ fails to meet the distinction requirement. After Hegel, I call this kind of argument *the emptiness criticism*, since it claims that formal principles cannot determine what *contents* (i.e., ends or maxims) are valuable; in this sense, formal principles are empty in themselves and must presuppose other contentful ethical judgments.

The distinction requirement is insufficient to determine the success of principles of construction and, as I will now show, it must be complemented by the second requirement, that is, the requirement that formal principles be evaluative. For even if a formal principle meets the distinction requirement, the distinction it draws may be entirely irrelevant from the evaluative viewpoint as such.⁹ Thus, consider the principle “desired ends are valuable if they are consistent with at least 16 other desired ends.” This principle can clearly distinguish between ends, for it is possible that some desired ends are not consistent with at least 16 other desired ends, and some are. However, as this example makes manifest, this kind of distinction has nothing to do with ethical justification. Hence, principles of construction are subject to the question “why is this principle evaluatively relevant?” or “why is it such that it ethically justifies?” In other words, we require that there be an explanation for why a principle of construction renders ends valuable. Moreover, the explanation cannot depend on presupposed ethical judgments since the very point of principle of construction is to account for ethical

⁹ Recall that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, value-rationality must provide a rational principle that is evaluative by virtue of the agent’s own rational capacity to value ends. See 1.6.

judgments. In section 2.3, I consider Michael Smith's robust principle of construction ("systematization") and show that while it may meet the *distinction requirement* it fails to meet the *evaluative requirement*. Furthermore, I criticize contemporary strategies to account for the evaluative nature of formal principles.

In section 2.4, I argue that value formalism, as such, is susceptible to what I call the *evaluative alchemy predicament*: Since *formal* justification, qua formal, rests on relations between contents (i.e., ends or maxims), it seems that if contents (ends or maxims) as such are devoid of value, then formal justification cannot alchemically render them valuable. At the same time, value-formalists cannot accept that ends, prior to formal justification, are valuable; for this would render justification *evaluatively idle*. What transpires is the *formalist dilemma*:

Ends bereft of justification are either valuable or non-valuable.

- If ends are valuable, then ethical justifications (including formalist ones) are *idle* (since they cannot *render* ends valuable);
- if ends are non-valuable, then formal justifications consist in *evaluative alchemy* (see the evaluative alchemy predicament).

2.2 The Emptiness Criticism

We find the claim that formal rationality is empty shortly after the publication of Kant's ethical works. A number of critics, including Hegel, argued that the universal formula of the categorical imperative cannot determine practical judgments unless aided by complementing value judgments.¹⁰ The universal formula cannot determine practical judgments because, like

¹⁰ Hegel, *Natural Law*, 76-78. For early post Kantian critics of formalism, see Allen Wood *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): Chapter 9.

other purely formal principles (e.g., the law of non-contradiction), it does not designate any ends we should pursue. In other words, it is *empty*. The *emptiness* criticism, it is important to note, is not limited to the quite trivial notion that formal rational principles do not provide us with ends to pursue. Rather, more strongly, it claims that purely formal principles cannot determine which of our desired ends we should act on. Accordingly, in themselves, formal principles fail the *distinction requirement*, namely, they cannot mark the distinction between merely desired ends and valuable ends; and hence, they cannot serve as sources of ethical justification.

The emptiness criticism can be either absolute or qualified. A formal principle is absolutely empty where it fails to mark *any* distinction between ends (or maxims).¹¹ Thus, the principle of identity (i.e., that everything is identical to itself) holds for every end and, hence, cannot draw *any* distinction between ends. However, even if a principle can distinguish between ends (or maxims), it may still be empty in a qualified sense, where it fails to mark the *right* distinction.¹² Thus, a formal principle that renders whims and compulsions valuable clearly draws the wrong distinction. Common to both variants is that a formal principle is criticized for being unable to determine correctly what contents (i.e., ends or maxims) are valuable without presupposing another ethical judgment.

Whether the emptiness criticism is successful when applied to Kant's ethics is a matter of ongoing debate among scholars of German idealism, about which I will remain silent.¹³

¹¹ For contemporary development of the qualified criticism against value-formalism, see Thomas Baldwin "Constructive Complaints" in *Constructivism in Ethics*. Ed. C. Bagnoli (Cambridge University Press, 2013): 201-221.

¹² Compare this notion of a qualified emptiness criticism with G. W. F. Hegel: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1991): §135.

¹³ For contemporary rejections of Hegel's criticism see Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, chapter 9, Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961); "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Moreover, my task in this section is not to argue that the emptiness criticism applies to every value-formalist theory. Indeed, I contend that some formal principles do make it possible to distinguish between valuable ends (see the next section). My task in this section is, rather, to argue in some detail that it applies to two of the most prominent contemporary value-formalist theories: Sharon Street's Humean constructivism and Christine Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism. The first, I will show, is absolutely empty, while the second is qualifiedly empty. Note that my purpose is not only to show that prominent contemporary views are susceptible to the emptiness criticism but also to explicate and refine the *distinction requirement*. Having this requirement clearly in view will be crucial in developing and assessing my own account of ethical justification.

Before I proceed, a note on terminology is in order. As I pointed out earlier, the category of theories I call value-formalism designates theories that differ significantly from each other. This variety brings with it terminological differences. For the sake of the unity and legibility of my treatment of value-formalism, I will employ a uniform terminology that is in line with the one I have employed in the previous parts of the dissertation. As a rule, I will confine terminological discussions to footnotes.

2.2.1 Street's Value Formalism and the Principle of "Consistence"¹⁴

2.2.1.1 – Introduction to Street's Value Formalism

In the past two decades, Sharon Street has been a central force in making constructivism (which is a kind of value-formalism) a dominant position in metaethics. Constructivists differ from other value-formalists in their conception of the base of construction (the SMS) and this difference will be at the center of our attention in section 2.4. This section concerns only Street's principle of construction, namely, the formal principle by which one's merely desired ends (i.e., the objects of one's SMS) are rendered valuable (namely, the objects of one ethical judgments). To get into view Street's principle of construction, we first need to consider how she understands the base of construction and ethical judgments.

Street defines the constituents of the base of construction, namely, one's SMS, as "states such as desires, attitudes of approval and disapproval, unreflective evaluative tendencies such as the tendency to experience X as counting in favor of or demanding Y." By contrast to the SMS, she defines ethical judgments as "judgments about what is a reason for what, about what one should or ought to do, about what is good, valuable, or worthwhile, about what is morally right or wrong, and so on."¹⁵ Now we can ask, what is the principle that renders some members of one's SMS valuable (i.e., objects of ethical judgments)? In a value-formalist theory, like Street's, the answer to this question will consist in a principle of

¹⁴ As a first step in considering Street's variant of value-formalism, I need to align her terminology with the one I have employed so far. First, following Korsgaard, Street often refers to the notion of the principle of construction using the terms "rational standard," "standard of justification" and "standard of correction." Second, Street names the constituents of base of construction (i.e., SMS) "evaluative attitudes." As the term "evaluative attitudes" suggests, for Street the base of construction is not entirely non-valuable. This is a feature of her theory (and of constructivism in general) that I will discuss when I turn to the formalist dilemma, in section 2.4. As I have just noted, for the sake of the unity of the discussion in this chapter, I will adhere to the terminology employed in this dissertation.

¹⁵ Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 110.

construction. On her view, an end is ethically justified if it is among the agent's ends in reflective equilibrium: 'The set of his ends that cohere with one another.'¹⁶ We see, then, that the principle of construction, in her theory, is coherence. Hence, coherence is that which distinguishes between a merely desired end and a valuable end.

“Coherence” is used in contemporary philosophy to denote different formal principles, some much stronger than others. Indeed, Street herself, at times, seems to employ different notions of coherence that run the gamut from a minimalist notion of consistence between ends, to a very strong notion of a network of mutually furthering ends.¹⁷ However, I will now argue that she does not entitle herself to the stronger notions of coherence, and that her principle of construction should therefore be understood as mere consistence.

The first thing to note is that value-formalist accounts must entitle themselves to the principle of construction. Namely, they must explain why the principle of construction functions as an ethical justification, that is, why it is the kind of principle that renders ends valuable or turns desires into ethical judgments. This requirement is what I above called the *evaluative requirement*. Clearly, not every formal principle is relevant to evaluation, and hence, value formalists must explain why their proposed principle is evaluatively relevant. Street offers such an explanation, but as we will now see, it entitles her only to a very minimal notion of coherence.

Street's first step in establishing coherence as a principle of construction is to note that ethical judgments, as such, entail further evaluative judgments. An ethical judgment, unlike a mere desire, generates reasons for other evaluative judgments. Thus, “whereas *taking oneself to*

¹⁶ Street, *ibid*, 152-154

¹⁷ See, “Constitutivism about Reasons” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics: Volume III*. Ed. Shafer-Landau, Russ. (Oxford University Press, 2008): 235.

have reason [i.e., judging] to live constitutively involves *taking oneself to have reason* to undergo the leg amputation that one knows is necessary, the attitude of desire is characterized by no analogous constitutive involvement: one can *desire* to live while having no *desire* whatsoever to undergo the leg amputation.”¹⁸ This means that if I judge that I have reason to do A, or that A is valuable, I thereby also judge that I have a reason to do B, if B is necessary for attaining A. If I don’t take myself to have reason to B, it means that I didn’t judge A to be valuable. Hence, it is constitutive of ethical judgments that they entail other evaluative judgments; they are not isolated.

We can now see how the constitutive entailments of ethical judgments ground coherence as a principle of construction: Let X and Y be two ethical judgments. As ethical judgments, they constitutively entail other evaluative judgments (X’1...X’n and Y’1...Y’n respectively). The entailed evaluative judgments, as we have just seen, concern ends that are valuable because they either instantiate or further either X or Y. Now, at least potentially, X and Y can entail incompatible judgments, for it may be the case that an end that furthers or instantiates X is incompatible with an end that furthers or instantiates Y. In other words, it is possible that X entails X1 while Y entails Y1 where Y1 and X1 are incompatible. This means that Y1 and X1 cannot be both pursued, and, hence, that the agent can have a reason to pursue only one of them. But since, as Street noted, it is constitutive of X and Y, qua ethical judgments, that they entail that X1 and Y1 are valuable, it follows that the rejection of either X1 or Y1 implies that either X or Y isn’t an ethical judgment.

The conclusion of this argument is that *coherence* is constitutive for ethical judgments. If this argument is successful, it vindicates coherence as a principle of construction. But the

¹⁸ Street, “Constitutivism about Reasons, 230-231 and Sharon Street, “What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?” *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 5 (May 1, 2010): 370.

sense of coherence thereby vindicated is very minimal: It is constitutive of ethical judgments that they are *consistent* with each other and with the entailments of each other. Nothing in the argument implies any stronger sense of coherence, such as mutual support of ends. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I shall refer to Street's principle of construction as "consistence."

2.2.1.2 "Consistence" is Empty

In this section, I argue that "consistence" cannot serve as the principle of construction since it fails the "distinction requirement," namely, it fails to draw the distinction between ethical judgments and mere desires, or similarly, between valuable ends and merely desired ends. As I noted above, a formal principle can fail the distinction requirement, namely, be empty, in two ways: absolutely (like the principle of identity) and in a qualified way. I will first show that "consistence" fails the distinction requirements in both ways. This failure entails that "consistence," in and of itself, is *insufficient* as a principle of construction and therefore must be either rejected or complemented by other principles. I then consider two complementary principles proposed by Street and show that both are inadequate.

I begin with the qualified emptiness criticism, namely, with the claim that "consistence" does not distinguish between valuable and merely desired ends in the *right* way. Specifically, it seems like the wrong principle to distinguish between valuable ends and whims or compulsions, for there is no reason to assume that whims and compulsions are inconsistent with other ends. According to "consistence," weird and meaningless desires (i.e., bizires), like the desire to turn on any radio in one's surroundings¹⁹ or to drink a saucer of mud,²⁰ are

¹⁹ See, Warren Quinn, "Putting Rationality in its Place."

²⁰ See, Anscombe, *Intention*.

valuable if they do not conflict with other valuable ends. In other words, such whims are ethically justified, in case they are consistent with other valuable ends. The problem is that there is nothing in the nature of whims and compulsion that makes them necessarily inconsistent with valuable ends. “Consistence” therefore seems inadequate as an ethical justification. To make things worse, it seems that the more marginal, inconsequential, and isolated a desire is, the more likely it is to be consistent with other ends; in other words, the more likely it is, in Street’s view, to be valuable. For the more inconsequential and marginal a desire is, the fewer entailments it carries and the less likely it, or its entailed consequences, are to disagree with the agent’s other valuable ends. Hence, it follows, absurdly, that the more inconsequential and isolated a desire, the better a candidate it is for being valuable.

Thus, consider transient desire to whistle the opening notes of Per Gynt. In most circumstances, fulfilling this desire neither interferes with any other members of my SMS, nor is it incompatible with ends I hold valuable. After all, whistling this soft pentatonic melody takes only a short time and little effort and it is unlikely to disturb anybody. What characterizes some of the most meaningless and worthless whims (like turning on radios in one’s vicinity or rolling an orange over one’s desk) is that they entail very little, and it is exactly because almost nothing is entailed that such whims tend to be compatible with other evaluative judgments. We thus arrive at the absurd result that the more insignificant and inconsequential a desire, the more likely it is to be among the agent’s judgments in reflective equilibrium and, hence, a true evaluative judgment. Since Street’s account provides us only with the “consistence” principle of construction, it turns out that whims are the best candidates for ethical judgments.

This offends our intuition that a true ethical judgment concerns something significant and central for the agent; or in Street’s words, something that is “deeply hers.”²¹

We see that “consistence” alone is qualifiedly empty since it fails to distinguish between merely desired and valuable ends in the *right way*. Now, I will argue that it is also absolutely empty, namely, that it fails to make *any* distinction between ends because for every end in one’s SMS, there is a consistent subset of the SMS to which it belongs.²² In other words, I will argue that “consistence” is not a function that can draw a distinction between two kinds of ends and, for that reason, also not between valuable and merely desired ends. The problem with “consistence” is simple: say that one holds the conflicting judgments P and C—how would we go about determining which of these judgments are among one’s set of “consistent” judgments? After all, it is equally true for both judgments that they are incompatible with each other, so that at least one of them isn’t among the agent’s set of ethical judgments. But which one? “Consistence,” in and of itself, cannot decide this question. “Consistence” is a function that, for any finite number of objects, yields a finite number of consistent subsets, between which it is indifferent. It is essentially unable to privilege one such subset over any other.²³

My argument showed that “consistence” fails the *distinction requirement* and, hence, it must be rejected as a principle of construction.²⁴ I now turn now to consider the stronger neo-Kantian principle of construction—“universalization”—in relation to the emptiness criticism.

²¹ Street, “Constitutivism about Reasons”, 234-235.

²² If we define a consistent set as a set in which there are no incompatible members, it follows that each member of one’s SMS belongs to at least one consistent subset; namely, the subset that consists of that member alone.

²³ If we stipulate that “consistence” precludes one-member subsets, then it may occur that one’s SMS consists of only one consistent subset. However, beside its being an unjustified stipulation, it also remains entirely accidental that one’s SMS consists of only one consistent subset; that is, the existence of a unique consistent multi-member subset is not guaranteed.

²⁴ Street gestures at what might complement “consistence.” She proposes that in case of a conflict between judgments, the agent ought to opt for the one more “deeply hers.” Accordingly, what justifies an ethical judgment is how deeply it is one’s own. Street, “Constitutivism about Reasons”, 234-235. The question is what

2.2.2 The Neo-Kantian Universalization Principle

2.2.2.1 Introduction

When contemporary philosophers speak about ‘formalism’ in ethics, what they usually have in mind is the *neo-Kantian* principle of universalization. On this principle (henceforward “universalization”), what renders maxims valuable is that they can be willed universally, without contradiction. In this section, I will argue that while neo-Kantian interpretations of “universalization” can distinguish between different kinds of maxims, they still fail to distinguish them in the *right way*.²⁵ This line of criticism harkens back to the earliest critics of Kant’s practical philosophy who argued that his categorical imperative, and specifically the *formula of universal law* is empty. Hegel’s own version of the emptiness criticism has become something of a *locus classicus* and a point of departure for many contemporary treatments of the emptiness charge.

formal principle renders one’s principle deeply one’s own? On that question, Street says very little. Thus, she suggests that an end is more deeply one’s own, the more central it is to one’s web of desires. However, she does not go beyond the intuitive appeal of this suggestion. Most importantly, she does not explain why being at the center of a web of desires constitutes an ethical justification. In my own view (i.e., organic holism) ethical justification consists in a system of holistically justified ends and hence it supports something like Street’s notion of a web of ends (see, Chapters 4 & 5).

²⁵ Entering Kantian territory brings with it a terminological shift of philosophical significance. While my discussion, until this point, has been concerned with ends being valuable or non-valuable, Kantians are first and foremost concerned with maxims being right or wrong. Hence, the transition to Kantianism may seem like a change of subject; specifically, it might seem that I overlook a transition from teleological to deontological ethics. However, the transition is not as dramatic as it might seem. My working definition of value does not limit my discussion to teleological theories (theories of goodness). Since I defined value as “that which gives rise to justifying reasons,” it is neutral between deontological and teleological theories. Yet, a few modifications are in order. First, in the discussion of “universalization,” *ethical judgments* are judgments that concern whether *maxims* are a source of justification, namely whether they are right or wrong. Ethical justification is that which renders maxims right, namely, “universalization.” The “distinction requirement,” in this context, concerns the distinction between right and wrong maxims.

My own discussion will not be an exception in this regard. Accordingly, though Kant's own views are not the direct subject of this section, I begin with a quote of his formula of universal law that Hegel criticizes:

*Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*²⁶

This implies that in some cases it is impossible (in some sense of 'impossible') to both act on a maxim and will the same maxim as a universal law. Such cases are ones in which there is a *contradiction* between acting on a maxim and willing it as a universal law. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, we find the following illustration of this kind of contradiction: A man, now deceased, has left a sizable deposit in another's care, without leaving any record of it. Kant argues that one ought not to act on the maxim of denying the deposit and appropriating the money because its universalization yields a contradiction. The universalized maxim "that everyone may deny a deposit which no one can prove has been made [...] would annihilate itself, since it would bring it about that there would be no deposits at all."²⁷ For that reason, one cannot will the universalized maxim. To this, Hegel replies "But what is the contradiction if there were no deposits?"²⁸ He notes that there is a contradiction here only if we assume that one necessarily wills that there be deposits or other institution for which deposit is necessary. Otherwise, what the universalization of the maxim shows is only that in a world in which such maxim *is* a universal law, there are *no* deposits. And this does not seem like a contradiction. In

²⁶ Emmanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Translated and Edited by M. J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁷ Immanuel Kant *Critique of Practical Reason*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Translated and Edited by M. J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 161 (5:27).

²⁸ Hegel, *Natural Law*, 77.

the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel levels a similar criticism against the claim that “universalization” prohibits actions like stealing or murdering:

The fact that *no property* is present is in itself [*für sich*] no more contradictory than is the non-existence of this or that individual people, family, etc., or the complete *absence of human life*. But if it is already established and presupposed that property and human life should exist and be respected, then it is a contradiction to commit theft or murder; a contradiction must be a contradiction with something, that is, with a content which is already fundamentally present as an established principle. Only to a principle of this kind does an action stand in a relation [*Beziehung*] of agreement or contradiction.²⁹

This criticism of the formula of universal law has come to be known as the *emptiness criticism*, since it claims that unless we presuppose that certain contents (i.e., ends, practices or maxims) are valuable, the merely formal principle of “universalization” cannot determine which maxims constitute duties and which are prohibited.; that is, “universalization” is *empty*, and must be complemented by contentful determinations.

In the previous section, I proposed a similar criticism against Street’s account and concluded that her proposed principle of construction (i.e., “consistence”) is absolutely empty, for it cannot distinguish at all between ends. Any end can belong to a consistent subset of one’s SMS. I also noted that the emptiness criticism has a weaker version according to which, while the formal principle can distinguish between ends or maxims, it does so in the wrong way. Now we should ask, how strong is the emptiness criticism against “universalization”?

In his earliest formulation of the emptiness criticism, Hegel holds that the formula of universal law is *absolutely* empty. He claims that *every* end or maxim can be universalized without

²⁹ Hegel, *Elements in the Philosophy of Right*, §135.

a contradiction unless we illicitly presuppose that some ends or maxims are valuable;³⁰ hence, “universalization” can draw no distinction between maxims. However, this seems like an overly strong criticism. For, clearly, not every maxim is such that when thought of as a universal law, it entails the annihilation of a principle or the rejection of some end. Thus, the maxim “help your friends when they are in need” does not seem to involve any such annihilation, while the maxim “steal whenever you need money” will annihilate property, if turned into a universal law. Hence, “universalization” *does* establish a distinction between maxims, for not all universalized maxims entail the annihilation of other principles or ends.

However, though the formula of universal law can establish a distinction, as Hegel came to see in his later work,³¹ still he contends that it is *absolutely* empty; namely, that without presupposing other valuable ends or practices, the formula of universal law cannot determine *any* ethical judgments (or duties). This is because the notion of contradiction in which “universalization” consists, requires that we presuppose valuable ends or practices that the universalized maxim contradicts. So, while it is true that only some universalized maxims entail the annihilation of practices or ends, still, this alone does not suffice for the determination of an ethical judgment (or duty); what is missing is a contradiction, and for the sake of contradiction, the value of practices or ends must be presupposed. Hence, “universalization” in itself (i.e., without such presupposition) is still empty.

Many commentators have pointed out that this criticism rests on a wrong notion of contradiction.³² The relevant sense of contradiction is not, as Hegel thought, between the

³⁰ Hegel, *Natural Law*. Pp. 76-77.

³¹ In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel notes that while the notion of contradiction is absolutely empty, the universalization of maxims “does yield a more *concrete* representation [*Vorstellung*] of the situation in question” §135. Yet, even here Hegel claims that “universalization” alone cannot derive duties unless we presuppose valuable contents. See also §§15-17.

³² Allen Wood *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 156-157. Korsgaard “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” 86; Onora O’Neill, *Acting on principle: An essay on Kantian ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013): Chapter 5.

universalized maxim (e.g., “I will steal whenever I need money”) and an end or a practice (e.g., property) whose annihilation is entailed by the universalized maxim. Rather, these commentators maintain that the kind of contradiction Kant has in mind is between a universalized maxim and the efficacy or conceivability of the action proposed by the same maxim.³³ Thus, consider again the case of the denied deposit. The man in this case is acting on the maxim “I will deny the deposit to increase my wealth.” If universalized, this maxim gives rise to a contradiction between the annihilation of deposit in a world in which the universalized maxim is a law and the original maxim in which a deposit establishes the means to the end of increasing one’s wealth. Hence, willing such a universalized maxim is contradictory, since it involves both willing to profit by appropriating the deposit and willing a universal law whose pertaining makes it impossible to profit in this way. For one cannot profit from appropriating a deposit in a world in which deposits do not exist. On this interpretation, *pave* Hegel, the notion of contradiction invoked by “universalization” does not appeal to any presupposed ethical judgments (or valuable ends and practices).

2.2.2.2 The Wrong Kind of Distinction

We conclude that Hegel’s line of criticism fails to establish that “universalization” is *absolutely* empty. However, it may still be the case that the emptiness criticism holds in a weaker sense, namely, that the distinction between ends (or maxims) achieved by “universalization” is the wrong kind. In this subsection, I will argue that “universalization” (1) tends to approve of meaningless and marginal maxims (i.e., whimsical maxims), (2) that it often vindicates ends

³³ Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 157-58, John Kemp “Kant’s examples of the categorical imperative.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 8, no. 30 (1958): 63-71; Korsgaard and Korsgaard “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law.”

and maxims we consider malicious, and (3) that it can reject what we take to be valuable maxims and ends.

To see why “universalization” distinguishes between ends (or maxims) in the wrong way, it is helpful to have a clear view of what kinds of maxims are rejected by this principle of construction. We have just seen that in order to overcome Hegel’s criticism, neo-Kantians have proposed that the notion of contradiction involved in “universalization” is between the means prescribed by a maxim and the annihilation of a practice entailed by the same maxim if it holds as a universal law. I cannot both will the maxim “I will steal as a means of making money” and will that property be annihilated (which is implied by the universalized maxim); for without property, stealing becomes inconceivable or, at least, ineffective as means to my end (making money). Accordingly, we can characterize the kind of maxims that are rejected by “universalization”: These are maxims in which the means (e.g., stealing) depend on a practice (e.g., property) that is annihilated by universalizing the maxim.

Having a clear characterization of the kind of maxims we ought to reject, it is immediately striking that the scope of “universalization” is alarmingly narrow, for it concerns only maxims whose means depend on practices or social conditions. Means that do not depend on social conditions (e.g., ones that depend on natural laws) do not seem sensitive to universalization. But, surely, a great portion of the maxims we act on do not depend on practices. Thus, if I throw a stone in order to hit a rock (or any other end I aim at), I rely on natural laws which will remain unchanged by any maxim becoming a universal law. This means that “universalization” does not concern this great domain of human activity that does not employ means that depend on practices. Within this domain we find actions that span the gamut from the abhorrent (e.g., ends that can be served by harming living bodies), to the meaningless (e.g., licking clods of earth), and to the most benevolent (growing crops to feed

the poor). That all this vast domain of human activity is beyond the reach of “universalization” constitutes a serious difficulty.³⁴ At the very least, this difficulty implies that “universalization” must be complemented by further principles (like the formula of humanity).

I will now argue that even within its overly narrow scope, “universalization” distinguishes between ethical judgments and mere desired ends in the wrong way. This is, perhaps, most evident in the case of meaningless maxims, like whimsical and compulsive ones. Even when such maxims involve means that depend on practices, there seems to be nothing inherent in them that tends to undermine practices if they are universalized. Thus, consider the maxim “I will occasionally count people standing in line.” Now if, as a universal law, people were to count other people in lines, this would not undermine the practice of waiting in line, and hence, the universalized maxim does not give rise to a contradiction. That universalized meaningless maxims do not necessarily consist of contradictions shows that “universalization” fails to distinguish between them and valuable maxims.

Some Neo-Kantians will find this limitation of “universalization” unproblematic because they do not think it is supposed to determine what maxims or ends are valuable, but rather it determines the *permissibility* of maxims. Hence, the fact that some whimsical maxims are not rejected by “universalization” just shows that they are permissible, such that one may act on them, and this does not seem like a problematic implication. But then, a difficulty does arise for such Kantians if the opposite case holds, namely, if there are *innocuous* whimsical maxims that lead to a contradiction if universalized, which means that they are *impermissible* in

³⁴ While neo-Kantians sometimes note the objection, I have not encountered any convincing treatment of the problem. See, for example, Paul Dietrichson, “Kant's Criteria of Universalizability” in *Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals with Critical Essays*, Lewis White Beck (Trans.), Robert Paul Wolf (Ed.), (New York: Macmillan, 1969): 188. For Korsgaard’s criticism of Dietrichson’s proposal see “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” 82-85. In the same piece (pp. 99-101) Korsgaard puts forward her own attempt at overcoming the difficulty, but admits that, ultimately, “universalization” alone cannot account for all cases that do not involve practices.

the same way malicious maxims are. And as Allen Wood notes, such cases do exist. Here is his example: “I will occasionally accompany others through a doorway, and on those occasions, I will always go through the door last.” That this maxim cannot be universalized is clear, and this, as Wood also notes, is “a problem that an adequate defense of the formula of universal law would have to solve.”³⁵

This is what our discussion has shown so far: On the one hand “universalization” cannot distinguish between whimsical maxims and valuable ones, and on the other, it fails to distinguish between innocuous whimsical maxims and maxims we consider truly malicious—both are categorically impermissible. Hence, “universalization” fails the distinction requirement, even if we consider “universalization” merely as a permissibility principle. We also saw that the scope of “universalization” is too narrow, as it approves of malicious maxims as long as their means don’t depend on practices. I will now show that “universalization” also forbids just and righteous maxims.

In an oft-quoted passage, F. H. Bradley provides examples of a contradiction that follows from the universalization of maxims we consider perfectly moral:

‘Succor the poor’ both negates and presupposes (hence, posits) poverty: as Blake comically says:

Pity would be no more,

If we did not make somebody poor.

If you are to love your enemies, you must never be without them; and yet you try to get rid of them.

³⁵ Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 157.

Not only does Bradley provides us with examples, he also proposes a general schema for such examples. “Every duty which presupposes something to be negated” will yield a contradiction, and hence, he remarks ironically, it “is no duty; it is an immoral rule.”³⁶ Accordingly, not only does “universalization” approve certain malevolent maxims—it also forbids perfectly moral ones.

Korsgaard recognizes the gravity of this objection, but she maintains that the kind of examples provided by Bradley do not pose a real threat if we understand “universalization” correctly. On her corrected view, a universalized maxim consists of contradiction (in the relevant sense) if the end of the maxim (i.e., the purpose for which the means are taken) is thwarted, were the maxim universalized. Thus, consider “I will steal in order to get money.” The purpose of stealing, here, is getting money. If universalized, this maxim entails the annihilation of property, and if property does not exist, then no money can be procured. Hence, in this case, universalization thwarts the purpose of the maxim. Now, once we understand “universalization” in this corrected manner, we can see that Bradley’s examples do not yield contradictions in the relevant sense. Korsgaard writes: “One’s purpose in succoring the poor is to give them relief. The world of the universalized maxim only contradicts one’s will if it thwarts one’s purpose. A world without poverty does not contradict this purpose, but rather satisfies it another (better) way, and no contradiction arises.”³⁷

While this corrected “universalization” fares better with the problem raised by the Bradley-type of moral maxims, it fares worse with a type of malevolent maxims. Thus, consider the following nefarious maxim: “I will never keep my promises, in order to eradicate trust

³⁶ Bradley “Duty for Duty’s Sake” in *Ethical Studies* (New York, G. E. Stechert and co. 1911): 140.

³⁷ Korsgaard “Kant’s Formula of Universal law,” 95. For a further discussion see Singer, *Generalization in Ethics*, 279-92.

among humans.” If we adopt Korsgaard’s correction, then this vicious maxim does not lead to a contradiction if universalized. In the world of the universalized maxim, trust among humans does not exist. But a world without trust does not contradict the purpose of eradicating trust, but rather satisfies it another way. Korsgaard’s proposal opens the gate for the approval of especially shameless, vicious types of maxims, ones that not only take advantage of practices but also aim directly at the elimination of practices. By adopting her correction, we approve of every maxim whose purpose is the annihilation of a practice (or social condition) and whose means depend on this practice (or social condition). But as the example above shows, this structure is shared by noble actions, just as it is shared by shamelessly nefarious ones.

What then distinguishes between the nefarious “cheat in order to eliminate trust” and the benevolent “succor the poor in order to eradicate poverty”? At this point in our discussion, we have seen that “universalization” fails to draw the relevant distinction. The reason for this failure seems fairly clear from the commonsense perspective. For while “universalization” turns on the form of maxims (contradictory form), here the crucial difference between the maxims lies in their respective *ends*. For while we consider eliminating trust among humans to be extremely malicious, eradicating poverty is righteous. But these judgments concerning the value of ends are not explained by “universalization,” and therefore must be presupposed. This invites back Hegel’s emptiness criticism, according to which, recall, the formula of universal law alone is empty, and in order to yield ethical judgments, ethical judgments must be presupposed. It is this criticism that led neo-Kantians, in the first place, to propose reformed versions of “universalization” that highlighted the self-defeating character of morally objectionable universalized maxims. While these reformed versions are effective against the criticism that “universalization” cannot draw *any* distinction between ends (or maxims), we

have seen that they fail to draw the *right* distinction and that the right distinction seems to depend on presupposed ethical judgments, as Hegel claimed.³⁸

2.2.3 An Etiological Remark: Negative and Positive Principles

In this subsection, I have considered how two prominent principles of construction (i.e., “consistence” and “universalization”) fare with the emptiness criticism; namely, with the claim that formal principles fail the *distinction requirement*. We have seen that “consistence” fails to draw any distinction between ends (or maxims) and that “universalization” fails to draw the right kind of distinction. In each case, we’ve seen that without presupposing the value of certain contents (ends, maxims, or practices), the principle cannot distinguish properly between ends or maxims.

I wish to propose that both these principles fail to meet the distinction requirement because of a common characteristic: Both ultimately concern compatibility relations within a set of ends, means, and practices. Thus, “consistence” justifies sets of ends and means in so far as the members of this set are compatible with each other; and “universalization” justifies sets of ends and practices (i.e., maxims) as long as these are compatible when universalized. Such principles distinguish only between *sets* (whose members are ends, means, and practices), namely, between sets of compatible and incompatible members. Considered from the

³⁸ One may suggest that although “universalization” does not cover the entire domain of value, it does capture something valuable about maxims, that is, that they are fair. If, intuitively, in acting on a maxim that depends on a practice it undermines, one is making an exception of oneself at the expense of others (i.e., one is taking advantage of those who maintain the practice). It would seem, accordingly, that “universalization” excludes *unfair* maxims. But what our discussion has made present is that unfairness, in this sense, is ethically relevant only where the practice or social conditions are *valuable*, as in the case of “trust among humans.” However, taking advantage of deplorable practices or social conditions, (e.g. poverty or child labor), does not, in itself, seem morally problematic. These considerations suggest that the fairness captured in “universalization” is evaluatively relevant only where it is complimented by ethical judgments concerning the value of practices and ends. For an attempt to vindicate “universalization” by appeal to the notion of fairness, see Korsgaard’s “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law.”

perspective of each member of a set (e.g., an end), such principles afford merely *negative* justification, in the following sense: An end is justified, since it does *not* clash with other members of a set. In other words, on such principles, if we ask why an end (e.g., trust among humans) is valuable, the answer is in negative terms; it has the following form: “Because it does *not* interfere with other members in the set.”³⁹ By contrast, *positive justification* speaks *in favor* of members (e.g., ends) rather than merely indicating that they don’t interfere with each other. My proposal is that there is a link between the fact that the principles considered in this section are negative and their failure to meet the distinction requirement. Though I cannot provide a conclusive argument for this proposal, I will point out several considerations in its favor.

First, it is unsurprising that principles that concern only the compatibility of members of a set (i.e., negative principles) cannot determine whether the members are valuable or not. For it seems that if none of the members of a set are also positively justified, then sets can be perfectly compatible while being non-valuable. Indeed, it is hard to see why non-valuable ends are, by nature, inconsistent with each other or with means and practices;⁴⁰ and much of the above section works to make this point manifest. This suggests that if negative principles have a role in distinguishing between valuable and non-valuable ends (or other contents), they must presuppose that some ends are valuable. And, indeed, this is what we have seen throughout the section. Time after time, we have seen that the negative principles only indicate that some members are incompatible, but to determine the evaluative import of this incompatibility, a

³⁹ Notice that if an end is justified only by not harming other ends (i.e., negative justified), it implies rational indifference; for other ends *will not be harmed* whether we pursue this end or not.

⁴⁰ For a famous argument to that effect, see Aquinas, *On Evil*. Translated by Richard J. Regan, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2003): 391. See also Jean Porter, “The Unity of the Virtues and the Ambiguity of Goodness: A Reappraisal of Aquinas’s Theory of the Virtues.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 21, no. 1 (April 1, 1993): 137–63.

further ethical judgment is required. Moreover, it seems plausible that this further ethical judgment cannot be determined by another negative principle; it must be positive. In other words, to judge ethically, it is not enough to know that certain contents are compatible or incompatible; rather, we also must apply a positive principle that determines which contents (if any) are valuable.

Another way of bringing out the need to provide positive principles rather than merely negative ones, is that they can solve a difficulty that plagued both “consistence” and “universality,” namely, the case of meaningless, marginal ends (i.e., *bizires*). Both negative principles, we saw, tend to render whimsical ends (or maxims) valuable. Indeed, we have seen that such ends (or maxims) are *especially* liable to be approved by negative principles, since they are usually relatively inconsequential; and being inconsequential, they are less likely to be incompatible with other ends, means, or practices. Therefore, this failure to reject whimsical ends follows from the nature of negative principles.

Importantly, the cause of this failure is not that rationality (or justification) is impotent in marking the difference between whimsical and valuable ends. On the contrary, at least intuitively, justification seems to offer a clear distinction between them; it is just that negative justification is not the relevant kind of justification; positive justification *is*. For, if anything characterizes a whimsical end, it is that nothing speaks in *its* favor—in other words, no positive justification applies to it. By contrast, valuable ends seem to be supported by positive justifications. For example, it is rather easy to positively justify an end like “trust among human beings.” Thus, we may say that it is valuable because it supports large social enterprise, commercial activity, and administration of justice or, by contrast, it seems in the essence of whimsical ends that there is nothing to say in their favor. What renders “eating a saucer of

mud” or “counting blades of grass” whimsical⁴¹ is exactly that the agent can conceive of no point whatsoever in pursuing these ends. Hence, to distinguish between whimsical (or other forms of meaningless ends) and valuable ends, we require positive justification, and hence, negative principles like “consistence” and “universalization” must be complemented by positive principles.

Accordingly, we may say that to overcome the emptiness criticism and to meet the distinction requirement, value-formalism must provide positive principles, rather than merely negative ones. In the next section, I will consider value-formalist accounts, in which we also find positive justification and show that they fail to satisfy the second requirement I mentioned in the introduction, namely, the *evaluative requirement*.

2.3 The Evaluative Requirement

2.3.1 Introduction

To satisfy the evaluative requirement, principles of construction must be evaluatively relevant, and a failure to do so subjects principles to the charge of evaluative irrelevance. Just as some formal principles are empty (as we have seen in the previous section), some are *irrelevant*. Thus, as I noted in the introduction, the principle “desired ends are valuable if they are consistent with at least 16 other desired ends” is a bold example of evaluative irrelevance.

In turning to discuss the evaluative requirement, the first question we ought to ask is what can make a formal principle evaluatively relevant? What kind of explanation would satisfy

⁴¹ Whether an end is whimsical depends on a wider context; the same ends I use here, as an example for whimsical ends (as Anscombe and Rawls originally introduced them), may be non-whimsical in another context. For example, where they are not final ends but rather instrumental ends (e.g., “I count blades of grass for a scientific experiment”). I will revisit this point in the next chapter.

the evaluative requirement? We can reject, at the outset, two kinds of explanations: First, we reject explanations that reside in intuition, like “it is intuitive that ‘universalization’ renders ends (or maxims) valuable.” We reject this kind of explanation because what we require is to understand *why* a principle (e.g., “universalization”) renders ends (or maxims) valuable, and as I have noted in the introduction, intuitive explanations may tell us *that* a principle is evaluatively relevant, but not *why* it is relevant. We also reject explanations that appeal to members of the agent’s SMS. Thus, we shall reject an explanation like “the universalization principle renders ends valuable because I desire that all my actions be universalizable.” We saw in the previous chapter that one’s SMS cannot ground ethical justification, namely, the distinction between what is valuable and what is not. Surely, then, we cannot appeal to one’s SMS to explain why a certain principle is evaluatively relevant, for the point of appealing to formal principles was to establish ethical justification.

A satisfying explanation for the evaluative relevance of a formal principle must be such that it ties the principle to characteristics that are constitutive of the evaluative viewpoint. Thus, we have seen at the end of the previous chapter that identification with an end is constitutive for valuing this end. Hence, if we can show that a formal principle (e.g., “universalization”) is conceptually tied to identification, this will establish its evaluative relevance. This kind of explanation is often called “constitutive explanation” and it is one of the aims of this section to explore varieties of explanations of this kind.⁴²

As in the previous section, the task of this section is not to argue that all value-formalist accounts fail to satisfy the evaluative requirement. The task, rather, is to explicate the evaluative

⁴² Cf. Bagnoli, *Constructivism in Ethics*, 17; Andrews Reath “Formal principles and the form of a law.” In Andrews Reath & Jens Timmermann (eds.), *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

requirement and make manifest the challenges it brings, for the sake of later assessing my own view. The way I will pursue this task is by discussing prominent contemporary value-formalist accounts and showing in what ways they fail the evaluative requirement. While this section focuses on the evaluative requirement, it also continues the discussion of the previous section, as it seeks positive principles rather than merely negative ones.

2.3.2 Michael Smith's Systematization

Michael Smith developed in his book *The Moral Question* a principle of construction that consists of a positive justification. On this principle, one's valuable ends are those that belong to one's maximally systematized set of desired ends. I will call this principle "systematization." According to Smith, a set of desires is made more systematic by adding to the host of "specific and general desires another general desire, or a more general desire still, a desire that, in turn, justifies and explains the more specific desires."⁴³ One's valued ends are, therefore, (1) members of one's SMS that can be systematized under more general ends and (2) these more general ends. It is helpful to consider an illustration of this principle: Among Noah's SMS, we find a great number of ends that concern his family. Thus, he desires to educate his nephews and nieces, take care of his old aunt, spend as much time as possible with his parents, and facilitate family gatherings. These and other of his family-related desired ends can be made more systematized if Noah also desires a more general end, like "maintaining and invigorating my family life." This higher, more general end both unifies the lower ends and justifies them. Thus, if asked why he desires to play and educate his niece, he may say "because I desire to

⁴³ Michael Smith, *The Moral Question*, 159

maintain and enliven my family life.”⁴⁴ Noah’s SMS can be further systematized if his familial desires are unified with his communal and political desires, and so on and so forth.

As Noah’s example shows, “systematization” consists of a positive aspect since it requires that desired ends be justified by more general ends. Hence, ends are not merely justified negatively (i.e., by *not* contradicting other ends) but also positively, since we can speak in their favor. Thus, Noah’s “general familial end” speaks in favor of visiting his aunt. But isn’t this positive justification a contentful one? After all, if one end is justified by another end (like the ‘general familial end’) this seems, by definition,⁴⁵ to be a contentful justification and it is the premise of this chapter (and the conclusion of the previous chapter) that justification must be formal. For, recall that unless we presuppose that rational intuition exists, it means that contents (like ends and practices) are justified either by other contents (and this seems to lead to a regress) or by formal justification.⁴⁶ The worry is, then, that “systematization” consists of contentful positive justifications, and that this will give rise to a regress: If what justifies positively are general ends, these general ends must also be justified by still more general ends. At a certain point, we must arrive at ends that are the most general in the system, and these ends, which are the springs of positive justification, are themselves unjustified. And this, as we have noted several times before, seems absurd.

What makes “systematization” an attractive principle of construction is that it does provide a way to justify even the most general ends. They are justified if they belong to one’s maximally systematized set of desired ends. This means that while the most general ends are not justified by yet more general ends, they are still justified formally, since they belong to the

⁴⁴ For a similar example given by Smith, see his *Ethics and the A Priori: Selected Essays on Moral Psychology and Meta-Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004): 269.

⁴⁵ See introduction to the chapter where I define content and form.

⁴⁶ See section 1.4-1.5.

maximally systematized SMS. Moreover, we should note that the notion that there is one maximally systematized SMS (or at least *a* maximally systematized SMS)⁴⁷ is plausible. For, unlike “consistence,” the notion of system meets the distinction requirement, at least in the minimal sense that it provides a metric by which sets can be distinguished. While all consistent sets are equally consistent, not all systematized sets are systematic to the same extent. It is a further question whether “systematization” distinguishes between valuable and non-valuable ends in the right way (i.e., what I called the weaker emptiness criticism). However, I shall put this concern aside for now, to turn to the main concern of this section, namely, whether “systematization” meets the evaluative requirement. The question we ask, therefore, is why does “systematization” render one’s desired ends valuable?

As a first step, it is useful to clear out of the way a couple of answers. I begin with an answer that seems to many appealing (including Smith in later writings): A maximally systematized SMS sometimes seems intuitively evaluative because it facilitates desire satisfaction and maximization of pleasure.⁴⁸ The thought is that, in systematized SMSs, the satisfaction of a desire isn’t only compatible with the satisfaction of other desires (this is true also for a consistent SMS), but moreover, it *supports and furthers* the satisfaction of other desires and, hence, a maximally systematized SMS is preferable to a less systematized SMS. Whether

⁴⁷ In other words, it is still an open question whether for each SMS corresponds *only one* maximally systematized set. I do not see any reason why this should be the case and Smith does not provide any convincing argument to this effect but rather assumes its correctness. In fact, he assumes the correctness of a much stronger position: Not only does each SMS correspond to one maximally systematized set of ends but also that all maximally systematized SMSs converge. Smith thinks that convergence is a condition for the intelligibility of normative reasons, and hence, he concludes that either all systematized SMSs converge, or our only resort is error theory. For our purposes, it is important to note that even if none of Smith’s assumptions here are correct, still the function of maximization *can* choose between different sets, and while “consistence” cannot be maximized, “systematization” can.

⁴⁸ Smith writes “To be an agent is to be the sort of thing whose function is to realize its desire, something that it might do well or badly.” Michael Smith, “The Magic of Constitutivism,” 189. See also, Smith “A constitutivist theory of reasons: Its promise and parts.” *Law, Ethics and Philosophy* 1 (2013): 9-30. I’m indebted to Matthias Haase for referring me to this part of Smith’s work.

this thought is correct or not is of no consequence because, as I'll now show, it is irrelevant to the undertaking at hand: It cannot support an account of ethical justification, since it dogmatically presupposes such an account.

First, in the previous chapter (1.2.3) we saw that pleasure cannot be the measure of value. Not all values are pleasurable and not all pleasures are valuable, hence, the maximization of pleasure, as such, cannot be that which renders a maximally systematized SMS valuable. Second, maximizing desire satisfaction cannot serve as an evaluative standard, since desired ends are not necessarily of any value. Indeed, the central question of this dissertation is: What renders desired ends valuable, rather than merely desired? Assuming that satisfying desires is an evaluative standard presupposes that desired ends are valuable, rather than showing what renders them valuable. If many of the desires an agent has are whimsical, compulsive, or otherwise meaningless, maximizing their satisfaction has no value. Hence, we reject the intuitive suggestion that systematization is evaluatively relevant because it facilitates the maximization of either desires or pleasure.

In *The Moral Problem*, where Smith develops “systematization,” he suggests that the answer to the evaluative requirement is already found in the work of John Rawls on reflective equilibrium.⁴⁹ While there’s no doubt that principles similar to “systematization” play a major *evaluative* role in the Rawlsian tradition, I will now show that what renders them evaluative is inapplicable to the question of ethical justification with which we (and Smith) are concerned. For Rawls does not consider “systematization” as evaluatively relevant for agents *qua agents*; or in other words, he doesn’t argue that this principle is valuable as such. Rather, it is evaluatively

⁴⁹ Smith, *The Moral Dilemma*, 159-160, "Outline of a decision procedure for ethics." *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 2 (1951): 177-197; Norman Daniels "Wide reflective equilibrium and theory acceptance in ethics." *The Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 5 (1979): 256-282.

relevant for (1) certain kinds of political-social circumstances and (2) under certain evaluative assumptions (i.e., the desirability of decision theory). In the context of our investigation, both these considerations cannot be assumed. Let me present each of them, and then say more about their irrelevancy to our investigation.

A – Difference in Starting Point: Both in his early piece “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics” and in later works (e.g. “Theory of Justice and Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory”), Rawls does not argue that “systematization” is evaluatively relevant for agents qua agents. Rather, the judgments that serve as the basis for the construction of his system of justice are constitutive for a particular conception of a person explicitly characterized. He writes: “the leading idea is to establish a suitable connection between a *particular* conception of the person and first principles of justice.”⁵⁰ By *particular*, he means a specific kind of person, rather than person qua person (or agent qua agent). Thus, in “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory” the relevant agents are characterized as those affirmed in “the public culture of a democratic society.”⁵¹ Therefore, even if we assume that Rawls convincingly demonstrates that “systematization” is constitutive for the kind of agents under consideration in his theory, this does not apply to agents qua agents but only to a relevant, predefined, set of agents who conform to Rawls’ conception of the person. But our (and Smith’s) question is not restricted in this way. We ask what renders desired ends, in general, valuable, and hence, we cannot presuppose a kind of agent for whom certain ends are valuable, as Rawls does.⁵²

⁵⁰ Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 9 (1980): 515-572.

⁵¹ Rawls, *ibid.* Sharon Street describes the agents considered by Rawls as “citizens in a liberal democratic society, who are assumed to accept certain loosely characterized normative conceptions of society and the person.” Street “on the problem of attachment and loss” (an unpublished manuscript), p. 9-10.

⁵² Here it is useful to distinguish between what Sharon Street calls restricted and unrestricted versions of constructivism. Unrestricted constructivism concerns the evaluatively or agential viewpoints as such, and hence the constitutive evaluative principles it derives are of a non-restricted application; namely, they apply to all

B – Purpose of Investigation: In “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics,” upon which Smith explicitly relies, Rawls aims at developing a reasonable decision procedure for ethics, as the title makes evident.⁵³ Given this aim, general principles are desirable, since they allow competent agents to apply them to particular cases and, through this application, reach ethical decisions.⁵⁴ A system of normative principles, then, makes deduction of ethical decisions possible; but this is desirable only assuming that a decision procedure for ethics is desirable. In light of these considerations alone, then, “systematization” is merely a hypothetical good: if one sees the value of a decision procedure in ethics, then one indeed values the “systematization” of ethical principles. But where the antecedent doesn’t hold, neither does the consequent. While Rawls indeed assumes the value of decision procedure for ethics, Smith doesn’t and neither do we. Rather, we require a demonstration of the value of decision theory. However, such a demonstration seems implausible since the main argument in favor of decision procedure is from a political point of view and more particularly from a legal one. A procedure is attractive when there is a need to win the ascent of different agents; hence, it is relevant, as Rawls makes clear, when we seek social coordination.⁵⁵ But it is hard to see why an agent would wish to transform what she desires, just to make a decision

agents. By contrast, as we have just seen, Rawls’ is a restricted version of constructivism. The evaluative principles derived in such a theory are not relevant for agents as such, but rather to a restricted subset of agents. Clearly, for our search after ethical justification only the proposals made by unrestricted constructivism are relevant.

For the distinction between the two versions of constructivism see Sharon Street; I—Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, Volume 90, Issue 1, 1 June 2016: 161–189. C. Korsgaard, “Realism and constructivism in twentieth-century moral philosophy.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28, no. Supplement (2003): 99-122.

⁵³ Rawls, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics,” 177.

⁵⁴ Ethical decisions are judgments concerning ethical matters made by competent judges. See, Rawls, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics,” 178-184.

⁵⁵ Later in his career, Rawls explicitly stated his political assumptions, in particular the ideal of social cooperation, “implicit or latent in the public culture of a democratic society.” See “Justice as fairness: Political not metaphysical.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1985): 223-251. footnote 19. These assumptions make his project different from that of Smith’s in the crucial aspects just noted.

procedure possible. Surely, it is desirable to be guided by what is valuable and good,⁵⁶ but it is a wholly different matter to claim that principles are valuable by virtue of being action guiding (or providing a decision procedure). From the agential view point, as such, being action-guiding does not render a principle evaluatively relevant.

The considerations that render “systematization” valuable for Rawls’ theory, therefore, do not hold for Smith’s theory and are dogmatic in the context of our investigation. In accounting for ethical justification, our question is what, in general, renders ends valuable, and hence, we can neither presuppose a certain conception of agents and political circumstances (liberal democracy) nor can we assume any end as already valuable (e.g., political coordination).⁵⁷

2.3.3 Unity

In a symposium dedicated to *The Moral Problem*, Michael Smith addresses, very briefly, the “evaluative requirement.” He writes that “systematization” is evaluatively relevant, since “the only decisive point we can make about normativity is that arbitrariness, as such, always undermines normativity.”⁵⁸ Therefore, if “systematization” eradicates, or at least diminishes, arbitrariness then it is tied with the evaluative viewpoint (or as Smith prefers—the normative viewpoint). And, as we have seen earlier, “systematization” does seem to secure non-arbitrariness of lower desired ends, since they are justified by higher, more general ends. Thus,

⁵⁶ That an ethical theory should provide guidance for action is famously stressed by Sidgwick, *The Method of Ethics*, Introduction.

⁵⁷ A further point that makes Rawls theory irrelevant for Smith’s endeavor, is that reflective equilibrium presupposes ethical judgments. Namely, the basis of construction isn’t non-valuable ends (as it is for Smith) but rather subjectively valuable ends. See, Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 46.

⁵⁸ As I noted in the terminological remarks at the beginning of the section, Smith employs “normativity” in a similar way to my use of “evaluative.” Michael Smith, “In Defense of “The Moral Problem”” in *Ethics* 108 – responding to Copp, Sayre-Maccord and Brink. Pp. 89-96

in Noah's systematized SMS, his desires to visit his aunt and facilitate family gatherings are not arbitrary, since they are unified and justified by the "general familial end." Hence, if asked why he values visiting his aunt, he avoids arbitrariness by providing a justification (e.g., "because she is family").

At this point, two questions arise: First, what supports Smith's strong assertion that arbitrariness is incompatible with the evaluative viewpoint? And second, does "systematization" secure non-arbitrariness, and is it the only formal principle that does? Smith's own work offers little assistance in addressing these questions, since he does not develop his account of the evaluative nature of "systematization." But, he is surely not alone in recognizing that avoiding arbitrariness is evaluatively pertinent. That arbitrariness is incompatible with evaluative judgment is something that we have stressed and considered before. Indeed, the premise of this dissertation is that evaluative judgment requires ethical justification exactly *because* what we value cannot be an arbitrary matter for us. Much of our discussion in the previous chapter can be reformulated in terms of attempts to overcome the arbitrariness of merely desired ends. Thus, Frankfurt's account of higher order desires was designed to overcome the arbitrariness exhibited by the wanton. More generally, identification with one's ends emerged as a crucial notion exactly because we saw that without it, one's psychological attachment to ends is passive and arbitrary from one's viewpoint. By contrast, ends with which one identifies are not arbitrary—they are one's own.

Hence, the way Smith explains the evaluative relevance of "systematization" is not different from explanations we have encountered earlier. However, it does mark progress since it proposes a rational answer for the challenge of arbitrariness. Recall, the conclusion of the first chapter was that, for creatures like us, identification consists in rationality. Namely, we truly identify with *justified* ends. Or, in other words, ends with which we rationally identify are

non-arbitrary. In this context, we can see “systematization” as an account that meets the demand for rational identification: It is a rational principle by virtue of which ends are non-arbitrary, and by virtue of which we see our desired ends as justified.

Given our previous discussion of Smith’s account, the following objection arises: We have seen that in a systematized SMS, lower desired ends are justified by more general ends, and by virtue of this justification, they are less arbitrary. But we have also noted that the most general ends are not themselves justified by other ends; rather they are justified by another kind of consideration, namely, by virtue of belonging to the agent’s maximally justified SMS. Our question was, why is the latter kind of justification evaluatively relevant? And now we can ask: In what sense is one’s maximally systematized SMS non-arbitrary and one’s own?

Here again, while we find little help in Smith’s own work, we find help elsewhere; especially in the writings of Christine Korsgaard. Her work is especially helpful in this context, since she argues for a very general link between rational formal principles and the evaluative viewpoint; that is, a link pertinent not only for “systematization” but for other formal principles such as “consistence.” I will now consider this general evaluative link in some detail and show how it applies to various formal principles. This detour will eventually lead us back, at the end of the section, to “systematization.”

On Korsgaard’s account, rational principles are evaluatively relevant if they establish agential unity (the unity of one’s SMS) and unity, she argues, undergirds identification.⁵⁹ Agential unity, her argument goes, is a condition for the possibility of identification, since it constitutes the very distinction between what truly belongs to the agent and what she merely

⁵⁹ See, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 148-158. The notion that unity endows normativity (or value) is surely not new. Korsgaard models her own view after her interpretation of Plato’s republic. See for example, 443d-e.

finds in her or is merely “a force working in her or on her.”⁶⁰ Put in another way, if there is no unified agent, but merely a multiplicity of desires, then there is no sense in which ends belong to the agent; indeed, it is unclear if there’s a sense in which there is an agent anymore. Accordingly, an agent is constituted by a unifying principle. Desires that conform to the principle are those with which the agent identifies; they are not arbitrary forces “working in her or on her.”⁶¹ Therefore, rational principles that establish agential unity are evaluatively relevant, since they are constitutive for identification.

In this light, we can see how the principles we discussed in section 2.2 are tied with the evaluative viewpoint. For both “consistence” and “universalization” support unity in that they exclude incompatibility within a set of ends, means, and practices; and hence, preclude the case of an agent who is disunited and torn between incompatible pursuits. In the case of an extremely disunited agent who is subject to radically contrasting desiderative forces, it is unclear what ends belong to him and which are alien to him; and consequently, what ends are valuable for him and which aren’t. Such a radically disunited agent is one whose ends are inconsistent and, perhaps, non-universalizability and, therefore, “consistence” and “universalization” are tied with agential unity and, hence, with the evaluative viewpoint.

However, since these principles are merely negative (as we have seen in the previous section), they fail to secure the *right kind* of unity. Thus, an agent’s ends can be perfectly compatible and yet be whimsical. Hence, without a complementing positive principle, negative principles are futile. They state the formal characteristics of a unified SMS, but they are insufficient since they fail to determine the contents (ends or maxims) around which unity is constructed. This insufficiency is most striking in the case of “consistence” which, as we have

⁶⁰ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 45.

⁶¹ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, xii.

noted, cannot distinguish between any number of consistent subsets of one's SMS. We see therefore, that "consistence" and "universalization" are evaluatively relevant since they establish unity, but that their evaluative relevance is dependent on a further positive principle. In other words, only once we possess a positive principle that renders some ends (or maxims) valuable, is it relevant to require that other desired ends be consistent (or otherwise compatible) with one's valuable ends. What value-formalists need, therefore, is a complementary positive principle, that is, a principle that can speak in favor of ends, rather than merely state negative conditions for valuable ends. To meet this need, philosophers such as Christine Korsgaard and David Velleman appeal to the notion of "practical identity."⁶² I will first present this notion and then consider whether it meets the evaluative requirement.

A practical identity is "a description under which you value yourself and find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking," like being "someone's child or neighbor or being the citizen of a certain country."⁶³ Such identities are the sources of positive justifications. Thus, having the identity of a teacher, I have reasons to prepare my students for exams, to be sensitive to their particular needs, to improve my knowledge of the discipline I teach, etc. Notice that these are positive justifications, since they *speak in favor* of certain ends (e.g., patiently explaining an efficient method to solve arithmetical problems). While there is no doubt that practical identities provide positive justifications, it is unclear what makes these identities valuable. And this is a problem since, surely, if they are not valuable, then it is absurd that they would endow value on other contents (e.g., ends or practices). But how can practical

⁶² Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 101-130; Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 23-26; David Velleman, *How We Get Along*, chapter 1.

⁶³ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 23-24.

identities be ethically justified if the only formal principles we have are merely negative? What in a value-formalist framework can justify one's practical identities?

Korsgaard's answer is that our identities are valuable because we *choose* them; by *choosing* them we confer value onto them. It matters not what is the source of the content of my identity, whether it is handed down by tradition (e.g., to continue my family salt trading business), or suggested by my desires (e.g., to be a professional gamer), or arbitrarily invoked (e.g., by a throw of dice).⁶⁴ What matters is that I *choose* or *endorse* a certain content as my identity, and it is by virtue of my endorsement that an identity is a source of positive justifications. But isn't this identical to the *existentialist* position we have considered and rejected in the previous chapter?⁶⁵ How is Korsgaard's "choice" different from the existentialist "decision"? If it isn't, then we should reject Korsgaard's account on the same grounds we have rejected existentialistic accounts; namely, on the grounds that choice bereft of rationality is opposed to identification, since it is *arbitrary* from the agential viewpoint.⁶⁶

One common response to this objection is that unlike purely existentialist account, a neo-Kantian existential account, like Korsgaard's, requires that the agent endorses a practical identity *rationally*. This means that one can endorse only identities that conform to formal rational principles, such as "universalization" and "consistence."⁶⁷ Endorsing a practical identity is conditional upon universalizability of that identity. Hence, while I can rationally choose the identity of a brother, I cannot endorse the identity of a thief, since it cannot be

⁶⁴ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 23.

⁶⁵ For related lines of criticism see Thomas Nagel, "University and the Reflective Self" in *The Sources of Normativity*. Edited by Onora O'Neill (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 200-201; and Raymond Geuss "Morality and Identity" in *The Sources of Normativity*. Edited by Onora O'Neill (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 189-200. For Korsgaard's response see in *The Sources of Normativity*. Edited by Onora O'Neill (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 237-238.

⁶⁶ See section 1.5.1.

⁶⁷ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 22.

universalized. Hence, unlike pure existentialism, Korsgaard develops a rational existential account, in which formal rational considerations are factored into our choices of practical identities. This seems, on the face of it, like a good response to the objection that choice cannot establish identification; for while pure existentialist choice is arbitrary from the agential viewpoint, if choice is rational, as Korsgaard proposes, then the agent understands *why* she has chosen as she has, and hence, she identifies with her choice.

However, I will now show that this solution fails. Recall that we turned to discuss “practical identities” in an attempt to provide a *positive principle* that will complement merely negative principles, such as “consistence” and “universalization.” Since practical identity is constituted by one’s choice, it follows that “choice” must be that which functions as positive justification. However, pure choice cannot function as a justification at all since it is arbitrary. For that reason, Korsgaard turns to the notion of *rational* choice, but the rationalizing principles she invokes are negative ones (e.g., “universalization”); indeed, they are the same principles that were supposed to be *positively* complemented by “choice.” Hence, “practical identity” does not truly provide us with positive justification, since it *depends* on rational positive justification, and such justification is still missing.

An example can be useful here: On Korsgaard’s account, what speaks in favor of my practical identity as a teacher is that I *choose* it. Rational principles, like “universalization,” justify my identity only negatively, namely, by indicating that it does *not* lead to a contradiction (within a maxim or a set of ends). Hence, my act of choosing (i.e., my endorsing the identity of a teacher) remains the only positive justification, namely, the *only* consideration that speaks in favor of my practical identity. Therefore, while rationality sets constraints on what I can identify with (e.g., a negative justification), there is *nothing* rational in the positive justification for my practical identity—it is *purely* existential, for it consists in my choice alone.

We see, accordingly, that Korsgaard's view is one Kant would consider heteronomous; the heteronomy being not that between rational and pathological desiderative faculties, but rather between rational and existential faculties. To avoid heteronomy, there must be a further positive *rational* principle that justifies one's choices; namely, a principle that renders valuable one's chosen practical identities. We find in Korsgaard's work an attempt to provide such a principle by arguing that choice itself is rationally justified. The argument has the following transcendental form: For the kind of beings we are (i.e., rational animals) ends are valuable only if we *confer* value on them *by* rationally choosing⁶⁸ them.⁶⁹ In other words, for creatures like us, the very possibility of valuable ends depends on the value-conferring power of choice. Hence, she concludes, our faculty of choice is value-conferring.⁷⁰

This transcendental argument is formal in the sense that it relies on no particular ends, practices, or maxims. It presupposes only that we must value some ends and that valuation requires choice. Hence, the argument supports the following formal principle: Because I am a rational animal, my rational choice of practical identities renders them valuable. Unlike the existentialist position we discussed in the previous chapter, Korsgaard's existentialist view is grounded in our *rational nature*; it is *because* we are rational beings that our faculty of choice must be value conferring.

But how is this supposed to help if choice, as we have shown, cannot establish identification (or evaluation), as it is arbitrary from the agential viewpoint? Thus, if I have no positive justification in endorsing my identity as a brother, then it seems that having the

⁶⁸ Where the notion of "rational choice" is understood, as I have articulated it above.

⁶⁹ Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 121–123 and *Self-Constitution*, 24.

⁷⁰ Sharon Street provides the following helpful formulation: Since we need reasons, and we can have reasons only if we endorse some particular practical identity or other, it follows that we have a reason to endorse particular practical identities. Street, "Coming to Terms with Contingency," 47.

identity of a brother is arbitrary and, hence, *alien* from my point of view. How can my understanding of my rational nature change the fact that I see no point in being a brother,⁷¹ namely, that I take being a brother as an arbitrary choice, akin to a choice of being a grass-counter or wall-licker? Korsgaard seems to argue that our nature necessitates that we value what we choose (for no justifications) because otherwise we will have no valuable ends. But even if her argument is cogent,⁷² it may lead to results opposite to what she intended: Rather than adjudicating the value-conferring status of human choice, it can be used to support skepticism about value. Namely, the argument can support the grim view that, for beings like us, *nothing at all* is valuable because we must ultimately rely on choice, and every end we choose would be arbitrary and therefore alien.⁷³ On this grim view, otherwise known as an existential angst, I must just choose some practical identity, but exactly for that reason, all practical identities are similarly alien to me.

2.3.4 Back to “Systematization”

Having considered other accounts, we are now equipped to see why Smith’s “systematization” principle is especially promising in two crucial regards: It seems like a positive principle rather than merely negative (like “consistence” and “universality”), and unlike “choice” it avoids arbitrariness. In this subsection, I will argue that while “systematization” does seem to improve

⁷¹ By which I mean that I see no *justification* for being a brother.

⁷² The next chapter may be seen as proving her argument wrong, since I show a way to rationally value ends that requires no existential choice. Hence, I reject her claim that existential choice is a necessary condition for valuing; a claim that serves as the premise for her transcendental argument.

⁷³ Transcendental arguments depend on the undeniable soundness of their premises, since they argue from the premise (e.g., experience) to the condition of possibility of the premise (e.g., the categories). If the first doesn’t hold, so the latter doesn’t hold. In this case, the crucial premise is that we indeed value ends, and from this premise, Korsgaard argues for the reality of value-conferring choice. Accordingly, her argument depends on the undeniability that we can value ends. However, value skepticism is exactly the view that doubts the possibility of value, and it is far from being a negligible ethical position.

on previous proposals, this promise is ultimately based in surreptitiously presupposing that some ends are valuable.

To see how “systematization” promises to improve on previous proposals, let us first go back to where we have left our discussion of this principle. We have noted that, in a systematized SMS, while lower desired ends are justified by more general ends, the most general ends are justified by virtue of belonging to one’s maximally systematized SMS. And our question was why is the latter kind of justification evaluatively relevant? Namely, why should we think that ends are rendered valuable by virtue of belonging to a systematized SMS? Turning to other constructivist theories, we proposed that “systematization” is evaluative since it establishes agential unity, and unity is constitutive for identification. This suggests the following answer to the above questions: The most general ends in an agent’s maximally systematized SMS are valuable because they constitute the agent’s unity. Thus, Noah’s “general familial end,” namely, the end of maintaining his family life, is justified because it unifies many of his desired ends (i.e., his familial ends).

Now we can see how “systematization” justifies the most general ends positively and not merely negatively like “consistence” and “universalization.” It justifies positively, since it supplies us with reasons that speak in favor of these ends. Thus, we can say that Noah’s “general familial end” is justified because it *unifies* many of his lower desired ends that concern his family. Hence, if asked why “sustaining his family life” is valuable, Noah can answer by appealing to lower desired ends it unifies. These ends are not merely compatible with his “general familial end,” rather they speak in favor of it; they indicate why it is especially suited to unify Noah’s character. What’s more, unlike existential choice, “systematization” supports a non-arbitrary positive justification; it is justified by one’s SMS; and it is by appealing to one’s SMS that we explain why a certain general end is justified and others are not. General ends are

justified in so far as they systematize the agent's SMS, and not every general end that Noah might endorse is equally systematizing. Thus, while the general "familial end" unifies many of Noah's desired familial ends, the end "to be an ornithologist" fails almost entirely to systematize Noah's SMS, which comprises of no desires concerning birds, natural taxonomy, migratory species, binoculars etc.

It seems, then, that "systematization" succeeds where previous accounts have failed as it is both a positive and a non-arbitrary principle. However, one must wonder if this success is legitimate; for isn't it peculiar that higher, more general ends are justified by appealing to the agent's lower desired ends, that is, the same desired ends that the general ends were supposed to ethically justify? This is especially inexplicable because in value-formalism, ends are non-valuable prior to being formally justified, and hence, it is unfathomable how non-justified desired ends could justify higher ends in a system. Thus, Noah's "general familial end" is justified by appeal to his various lower familial ends; but these ends, prior to being justified, are non-valuable and hence, how could they justify and speak in favor of any other end? According to value-formalism, bereft of justifications, Noah's familial desires are indistinguishable from the urge to turn-on radios or lick a nearby wall. Straw cannot be spun into gold.

Note that this difficulty is inescapable for "systematization" because if ends are justified by more general ends, at a certain point, the ascent to generality must stop; the most general ends cannot be further justified by more general ends and, hence, if they are justified by other ends, these must be lower ends; the same ends the general ends were supposed to justify.⁷⁴ This difficulty may explain why resourceful value-formalists like Korsgaard resist the

⁷⁴ It is this hierarchical or ascending nature of justification that renders "systematization" hopeless. The account I develop in the following chapter bears some affinities to "systematization" but rests in a form of justification

apparent appeal of “systematization” and avoid it, even at the cost of introducing to their accounts a problematic existentialist aspect. Moreover, it explains the pull of neo-Kantian versions of value-formalism in which the principle of construction (“universalization”) can determine (allegedly) what contents (maxims) are valuable, regardless of any particular contents of one’s SMS; namely, such principles determine valuable contents a priori. For, if some maxims are a priori valuable, it secures valuable contents without the need to appeal to one’s non-justified ends for justification. If pure reason is gold, we can leave the straw of our desires alone.

However, as I have argued in the previous section, the neo-Kantian “universalization,” being a merely negative principle, does not provide contents; nor, as we have just seen, can we attain positive justification by appealing to existentialist choice. We sought hope for positive justification in “systematization” only to discover that it illicitly relies on the value of non-justified desired ends. In the next section, I will argue that this difficulty is not due to insufficient efforts on the side of value-formalists, but rests in a fundamental problem I shall call the formalist dilemma.

But before I turn to that, a few words of conclusion are in order: In section 2.2, I argued that “consistence” and “universality” fail to meet the distinction requirement, since they are merely negative principles. In this section, we saw that this failure also impairs value-formalists’ capacity to meet the evaluative requirement. We saw that while formal principles may be evaluative, in so far as they provide unity, in the absence of positive justification, they fail to determine around what contents unity should be constructed. In concluding, I wish to

that is not merely hierarchical but also horizontal. In an organic form, ends justify each other by furthering and supporting each other; not only by instantiating each other, like in Smith’s “systematization.”

question the notion that unity can render formal principles evaluative. By this, I do not mean that unity is not tied with the evaluative point of view, as such, but rather that it is insufficient.

Recall, first, that unity was argued to be evaluative since it is a necessary condition for agential identification. For if the agent lacks unity, then there is no ‘one’ agent to speak of that can identify with ends. In other words, if an agent identifies with an end (i.e., if she subjectively values the end), it is the agent as a whole who identifies, rather than a part thereof. But, second, remember that our discussion in the first chapter has shown that identification must be active rather than passive, and it is the connection between activity and unity that I now wish to question.

Whether the unity of members is active or passive, seems to depend on the nature of the members. If we begin with a set of entirely passively given ends, then it is unclear in what sense their unity isn’t also passive.⁷⁵ And this seems to be the case with value-formalism since, by definition, the base of construction consists of nothing but passive non-justified members. If an agent’s desired ends are passive, how is it that their being consistent with each other renders them active? Consider the case of “systematization.” As we have just seen, more general ends are positively justified by lower ends. Now, since in value-formalism lower ends are passive, it is unclear how their justifying another end should render it active. For if they could, it would imply that paradigmatic passive desires, like whims, have the power to render

⁷⁵ It may be suggested that the unity is active because it is not given but rather constructed. But that suggestion is flawed in two ways: First, value-formalism does not require that the agent actually construct her united SMS; rather, it provides us with the formal principle that ethically justify. Hence, it is possible that an agent’s SMS be united by sheer luck or by a successful habituation. From the point of view of value-formalism, such an agent desires valuable ends since her ends conform to the principle of construction. Second, even if we require that the agent’s united SMS be the outcome of the agent’s active construction (as Korsgaard surely requires), still this does not entail that the agent’s united ends are active. It only entails that the process of arriving at the united SMS is active. For a similar criticism in relation to beliefs see Matthew Boyle, “‘Making up Your Mind’ and the Activity of Reason,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 11(17): 1-24. I will have more to say on the subject in the fourth chapter when I develop my own account of rational activity.

ends active. Thus, it would imply that turning on radios is rendered active, since it instantiates the whims of the radioman. This is clearly absurd.

What we see, then, is that unity alone cannot satisfy the evaluative requirement. Hence, rational principles must not function merely as unifying of one's SMS. They must also do so in a way that renders one's ends active, and we have seen that value-formalism fails in this regard. This failure is not accidental. It follows from the nature of value-formalism, as I will now turn to argue.

2.4 The Formalist Dilemma

At the end of the first chapter, we arrived at the conclusion that to distinguish non-valuable contents (ends, maxims, and practices) and valuable ends, we must appeal to justification. Against this backdrop, the idea that justification must be formal (i.e., value-formalism) is attractive. For it seems hopeless to try to justify contents by appeal to other contents, given that only justified contents are valuable; indeed, contentful ethical justification seems to involve a blatant vicious circularity or infinite regress.⁷⁶ In the course of this chapter, we have seen that value-formalists fail to meet the distinction and the evaluative requirements and the reason for this failure is, to a large extent, because formal principles seem to be merely negative. While in the previous sections we have seen how value-formalists illicitly rely on contentful justifications to account for positive justification, in this section I develop a criticism of the very notion of value-formalism. I argue that since formal justification, qua formal, rests in relation between contents (i.e., ends or maxims), it seems that if contents are absolutely devoid of value (because they are not justified), then formal justification cannot

⁷⁶ Unless, as I have noted several times, we endorse a form of rational intuition.

alchemically render them valuable. This predicament leads to what I shall call the *formalist dilemma*:

Ends bereft of justification are either valuable or non-valuable.

- If ends are valuable, then ethical justification is *idle* (since ends are valuable regardless of justification).
- If ends are non-valuable, then formal justification consists in *evaluative alchemy*.

Since I cannot show now that *every possible* variant of value-formalism necessarily leads to this formalist dilemma, I shall instead argue that the principles of value-formalism naturally lead to it. Moreover, I will show how each of the two most prominent contemporary schools of value formalism (psychologistic value-formalism and constructivist value-formalism) lead to one or another horn of the formalist dilemma.

As we have noted in the introduction, value formalist accounts share the following three level structure: In the first level, (i.e., the base of construction) there are contents (i.e. ends, maxims, or practices). In the second level, there are justifying formal principles. The constituents of the third level (i.e., valuable ends) are yielded through the application of the second level formal principles to the first level ends. The difference between psychologistic and constructivist value-formalism resides in the first level: while psychologistic accounts consider the ends given in the first level (i.e., the contents) non-valuable,⁷⁷ constructivists consider them valuable, in some sense.⁷⁸

I begin by showing how psychologistic accounts lead to evaluative alchemy. By psychologistic value-formalism, I denote a kind of metaethical account in which non-valuable,

⁷⁷ Or as they more often call it: Non-normative.

⁷⁸ For similar distinctions see J. Lenman and Y. Shemmer *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, 3 and Tamar Schapiro "What Are Theories of Desire Theories Of?" *Analytic Philosophy* 55, no. 2 (2014): 131-150.

purely psychological, desiderative attitudes (i.e., mere desires) are rendered valuable by virtue of a formal principle. Among the most influential accounts of this kind, we find Simon Blackburn's *quasi realism*, Allan Gibbard's *norm expressivism*, and Michael Smith's view in his book *The Moral Problem*. Thus, Blackburn's first level consists of reactive pro and con attitudes. These attitudes turn into ethical judgments, once we endorse them; and we endorse them if they conform to formal rational conditions, such as logical consistence and maximal coherence.⁷⁹ In Gibbard's first level, we find *contentful* norms of rationality; these norms are endorsed only if they conform to higher order formal norms (e.g., coherence).⁸⁰ Finally, Smith's first level consists of non-valuable desires. Ethical judgments, on his account, are beliefs about what we would desire that we do if we were fully *rational*, where rationality is understood formally.⁸¹ While these theories differ in many respects, they share the basic form of psychologicistic value-formalism: They all involve a first level of non-valuable contents (ends) and a second level of formal principles that render the first level contents valuable.

It is often argued against such accounts that formal justifications *cannot* render desired ends valuable, if desired ends are absolutely non-valuable, as such accounts state.⁸² In other words, according to this line of criticism, formal justification of valueless desired ends amounts to *evaluative alchemy*. Given the definition of content of form,⁸³ we can see here, in broad strokes, why, generally, psychologicistic value-formalism lead to evaluative alchemy. Form, we said,

⁷⁹ Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Grounding in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford University Press, 1984): 192-199. In Blackburn's view, formal justifications are required to explain the truth aptness of evaluative expressions. Valuable ends, unlike mere attitudes, belong to a maximally coherent set of values. See also Alexander Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014) 72-75.

⁸⁰ Allan Gibbard *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment*. Reprint Edition. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992): Chapters 8 and 9. Gibbard introduces the formal aspect of his account in an attempt to explain the objective purport of evaluative judgments.

⁸¹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 152. I have discussed Smith's formal principles in the previous section.

⁸² As I noted in the opening, this kind of criticism of formalism can be traced back to the first reactions to Kant. See Hegel, *Natural Law*, 76-78. For contemporary criticism, see Barry Stroud *Engagement and Metaphysical Dissatisfaction: Modality and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2011): Chapter 4.

⁸³ For the full definition, see the introduction of this chapter.

designates whatever isn't part of the elementary proposition. Now, note that formal elements like logical connectors, quantifiers, and rules of inference, concern relations between contents.⁸⁴ Formal principles are constructed from these formal elements. Thus, the principle of "consistence" is articulated by means of logical connectors and rules of inference, while "universalization" employs quantifiers. The problem is that if contents are without value, how, then, can any *relation* between them yield value? It would seem alchemical if valueless ends are rendered valuable just by virtue of relating to each other, in one way or another. Thus, if turning on radios is valueless, it seems like a case of alchemy if it becomes valuable by virtue of being consistent or supporting the end of licking walls. Or, to use a different example: If having a saucer of mud is non-valuable, why would it be valuable if having a saucer of mud (or a maxim that includes it) happens to be unverbalizable? Why should we consider it valuable if it happens to be the case that it can be made into a universal law for all agents without leading to a contradiction?⁸⁵ Therefore, the conjunction of the notion that non-justified ends are non-valuable and the notion that they are rendered valuable by virtue of formal principles seems impossible; tantamount to an evaluative alchemy.

In an attempt to avoid evaluative alchemy, another contemporary school of value-formalists maintains that non-justified ends are not entirely non-valuable. Following Sharon

⁸⁴ Negation is the one striking exception to this rule since it is not a relation between contents. However, negation does not pose a threat to the point I make in this section for it is not the kind of operation that can endow value. It seems clear that if P is non-valuable, it would not follow that $\sim P$ is valuable. Thus, if counting blades of grass is non-valuable, it does not render not counting blades of grass valuable. It is important not to confuse non-valuable contents with contents that we consider to be bad. Thus, for example, I consider humiliating my friends to be bad, but counting grass I consider to be just non-valuable. We may consider negation of the first to be in valuable. In the sense that it is valuable to avoid what is bad; but negation of the latter doesn't imply anything form an evaluative perspective.

⁸⁵ This kind of criticism resembles the famous criticism of coherentism in epistemology: If propositions do not track reality (i.e., state of affairs), then, even if they exhibit the utmost coherence they remain false. By all means, logical relations can serve as negative necessary conditions for the truth of propositions; thus, it is clear that if two propositions contradict each other, they cannot be both true. But that propositions cohere, does not entail that they are true.

Street, I will call this kind of value-formalism, value-constructivism.⁸⁶ In section 2.2, I provided a detailed criticism of Street's own version. Here, I would like to present my criticism of value-constructivism in the most general manner. Like psychologistic value-formalism, value-constructivism consists of a contentful base of construction and formal principles of construction. The difference is that, unlike psychologistic value-formalism, in value-constructivism the contents in the basis of construction are already, in some sense, *evaluative*; namely, ends are given through *evaluative* attitudes, rather than non-valuable desiderative attitudes.⁸⁷

But that invites the following worry concerning the evaluative status of ends without formal justifications:⁸⁸ If they are considered valuable, then it follows that formal justification is idle: It does not change the evaluative status of ends; or in other words, it does not render ends valuable because they are already valuable.⁸⁹ On the other hand, if the answer is that ends bereft of formal justification are non-valuable, then the view seems similar to psychologistic value-formalism and should be rejected on similar grounds (i.e., on the charge of evaluative alchemy).

⁸⁶ This school has grown out of the work of John Rawls and among its most prominent philosophers, we find his student Christine Korsgaard and her student Sharon Street. See Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, Chapter VII; Rawls "Kantian Constructivism and Moral Theory."

⁸⁷ In a recent volume dedicated to constructivism in ethics, the editors characterize constructivism in a similar manner. Moreover, usefully, they distinguish constructivism from other metaethical reductive views (e.g. expressivism) in the following way: "[...] it is distinctive of constructivism that the raw materials on which constructivism goes to work are *already* normative." Lenman and Shemmer, "Constructivism in Practical Philosophy," 3. See also, Street, "Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics," 365-366. For prominent constructivist theories who consider desired ends as evaluative, see Sharon Street and Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each other*.

⁸⁸ Cf., Michael Ridge "Kantian constructivism: Something old, something new." *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy* (2012): 138-158; see also James Lenman, "Expressivism and constructivism." *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy* (2012): 213-225.

⁸⁹ Note that it is futile to say that formal justification *augments* the value of ends. For our discussion concerns what *renders* ends valuable; not what renders ends more or less valuable (I touch on this topic in the next chapter). Nor will it help to suggest that formal principles are used in deciding on what end one should act. Such decision is orthogonal to the question of *whether* an end is valuable or not. I can choose not to act on a valuable end because it is incompatible with several other valuable ends; but whether an end is valuable is not the same question as whether I should pursue it in a given situation.

There is yet a third response to the difficulty at hand—the one Street favors: She rejects the separation between the attitude of valuing (the first ‘contentful’ level) and formal justification (the second level). According to this response, in valuing an end (i.e., having an evaluative attitude toward it), the end is constitutively subject to the rational (formal) scrutiny. This means that in valuing an end, one is already involved in justifying it formally. For example, in valuing going to a dinner, one judges that going to a dinner coheres with other ends one values. Hence, to ask whether an end prior to justification is valuable, rests in separating valuing and formal justification, and this separation is a misunderstanding of the constructivist position.⁹⁰

However, this view is unstable, as the following considerations will show. If the view is that valuable ends are constitutively *justified*, then we should ask how we should conceive of ends that are rejected in the process of justification. Thus, if it turns out that going to dinner is not justified, given my other ends, should I still consider going to dinner valuable or not? In other words, our original question concerning the evaluative status of non-justified ends resurfaces: Are non-justified ends valuable or not? And, again, if the answer is that they are valuable, then formal justification is evaluatively idle; while if the answer is negative, then evaluative alchemy ensues.

A constructivist might propose the following response: The principle of construction should be understood as a *test* and the evaluative attitudes (i.e., the constituents of the base of construction) should be understood as *proposals*. If a proposal, say “going to a dinner,” passes the test (e.g., it coheres with other ends), then it is valuable; if it doesn’t, it is non-valuable. Accordingly, a desired end (or an incentive) is neither valuable, nor is it non-valuable, rather,

⁹⁰ This is the constitutivist vein of constructivism. For a helpful exposition, see Street “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value.”

it is a proposal pending a rational test. In other words, rather than asserting that an end is valuable, a desire asks *whether* it is valuable, and reason *answers*. Thus, the desire to go to a dinner raises before the tribunal of reason the question, “should I go to the dinner?”⁹¹

But, rather than resolving the formalist dilemma, this suggestion merely obscures the dilemma. For we should now ask, what is the evaluative status of *proposals*? If desired ends, understood as proposals, are neither evaluative nor non-evaluative, what are they? The notion of proposal, in itself and as it is normally used, does not provide any clear answer to these questions. If one interpretation needs to be chosen, then talking about a proposed end seems to lend itself more naturally to an evaluative interpretation; that is, the end proposed is one the agent views as valuable but not (yet) valuable all-things-considered. It is not unfamiliar to consider various desired ends as a pool of proposals from which one needs to choose. Thus, I can deliberate between various desired ends and consider them as proposals calling for my decision: Should I go to a dinner party, get some more work done, or perhaps finish watching “I Claudius”? While I value all these ends, human finitude demands my decision; for I cannot pursue all of them tonight. In this case, my decision (according to the formal principle of construction) does not endow value on non-valuable proposed ends; rather, it determines on which of these *valuable* ends I am to act.⁹² If we conceive of proposals in this evaluative way, then the formal principle we employ to choose between them is not an ethical

⁹¹ The notion that desires (or inclinations) call out for our judgment is found in Korsgaard and Schapiro and, at times, this seems to be Street’s position. Thus, in “Coming to Terms with Contingency” Street maintains that the distinction between mere desires and valuing is not based in the latter being justified and the first not. Rather, they appear to the agent as two distinct attitudes. See Street “Coming to Terms with Contingency,” 42-43. See also, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, chapters 6-7. Tamar Schapiro “The nature of inclination.” *Ethics* 119, no. 2 (2009): 229-256.

⁹² It is often how Korsgaard seems to think about desired ends, or in her words, incentives. In *Self-Constitution*, she interprets Kant as holding similar views. Pp. 153-158.

justification, since it does not render any of them valuable (for they are *already* valuable). Hence, in the sense defined in the formalist dilemma, the principle is evaluatively idle.

We have just seen that the notion of proposed ends can be naturally understood as evaluative; now I wish to show that it can also be understood as non-evaluative. We can conceive of desired ends on the model of ends proposed to us by an external entity; say, a machine that prints out arbitrary possible activities. The outputs of this “ends machine” are non-valuable and it is up to us to evaluate them. When we conceive of desired ends as proposals in this way, we conceive of them as wholly non-evaluative, and they are rendered valuable only by virtue of passing the test of a formal principle of construction. But then, what is the difference between this conception of desired ends and psychological value-formalism? After all, in both cases, non-valuable desired ends are supposed to be ethically justified by formal principles, and hence, in both cases, we face the predicament of evaluative alchemy. It may seem that there is a difference between the theories because the notion of proposal suggests that desired ends “call out” for our decision; and this intrinsic link between desires and our decision isn’t an essential part of psychologistic value-formalism. But, whether desires indeed call out for our judgment or not is tangential to the predicament at hand. That is, even if we are required to formally test our desired ends, yet, if they are non-valuable, then formal principles cannot alchemically render them valuable, as I have argued earlier.

What we see, then, is that the formalist dilemma cannot be overcome just by appealing to the notion that desired ends are proposals brought to the tribunal of reason. Because, in itself, it does not offer an alternative to the two horns of the dilemma; proposed ends, as we have seen, can be understood as either valuable or non-valuable and lead, respectively, to either the evaluative idleness or alchemy horns of the dilemma. Therefore, rather than overcoming the dilemma, the notion of proposed ends obscures it, since it is indeterminate or neutral

between the two horns. Yet, it is a step in the right direction, in the sense that it seeks to transcend the dichotomy between valuable and non-valuable ends; transcending this binary evaluative set-up does promise to avoid either horn of the dilemma. In the next chapter, I will undertake the task of carving up a logical space between valuable and non-valuable ends by developing an account of *potentially* valuable ends.

2.5 Conclusion and Preview

Let us conclude by summarizing the result of this chapter:

1. The Distinction Difficulty: In section 2.2, we have seen that formal principles fail to distinguish between non-valuable, merely desired ends, and valuable ends. Whether such principles are absolutely empty (like “consistence”) or empty in a weaker sense (like “universalization”), they fail to meet the distinction requirement, since they are merely negative. Accordingly, we concluded that justification must consist of a positive aspect, namely, they must speak in favor of contents (ends, maxims, or practices) rather than merely indicating that they are not in conflict with each other.
2. The Evaluative Difficulty: Since evaluative justification is, by definition, a justification that renders ends valuable, it must be recognizable as evaluatively relevant. In section 2.3, we have seen that formal principles are evaluative since they establish agential unity, and unity supports identification with ends. However, a unity of passive contents is, in itself, passive rather than active. Accordingly, we concluded that to meet the evaluative requirement, rational principles must be such that they establish *active* unity, but this seems implausible given the nature of value-formalism.

3. The Evaluative Alchemy Difficulty: Since *formal* justification, qua formal, rests in relation between contents (i.e., ends or maxims), we have seen that if contents are absolutely devoid of value, then formal justification cannot alchemically render them valuable; but if contents are evaluative, then ethical justification is evaluatively idle. To overcome the formalist dilemma, value-formalism must transcend the dichotomy between valuable and non-valuable ends.

Each of these difficulties sets up a challenge for value-formalism: (1) To account for positive justification; (2) To account for the active nature of agential unity; (3) To transcend the valuable/non-valuable dichotomy. I develop my own account of ethical justification (i.e., organic holism) by responding to these challenges, beginning by addressing the third challenge in the next chapter.

3

Organic Holism and the Overcoming of the Formalistic Dilemma

In the last chapter, we have seen that value-formalism lead to a dilemma between evaluative alchemy and evaluative idleness. In this chapter, I argue that we can overcome this dilemma if we recover for contemporary ethics a robust use of the distinction between potency and actuality. Non-justified ends, I will argue, are neither valuable nor non-valuable, but rather *potentially valuable*. Justified ends, on the other hand, are *actually valuable*. Accordingly, formal justification ought to be viewed as actualizing ends' value. This account avoids the evaluative *alchemy* horn of the dilemma, since formal justification doesn't evaluatively *metamorphose* non-evaluative attitudes; rather it actualizes *potentially* valuable ends. It also avoids the *idleness* horn, for justification isn't idle; rather, it is needed to render merely potentially valuable ends *actually valuable* (3.1). The proposal that we should conceive of formal justification as actualization comes with many challenges (3.2). In coping with some of the main challenges, I will show that the best way to understand the actualization of potentially valuable ends is to model it on the actualization of incipient living organs. I then develop a novel value-formalist account that integrates the organic model (3.3) and I defend it against a number of objections (3.4-3.6). I call this novel account *Organic Holism*.

3.1 Non-Justified Ends as Potentially Valuable

I begin by arguing that the formalist dilemma starts to dissolve if we introduce the potency-actuality distinction in the following way: Rather than considering non-justified ends non-valuable, we should consider them *potentially-valuable*. Justified ends, we should consider *actually* valuable. To see how this

distinction dissolves the formalist dilemma, notice, first, that the dilemma turns on the prevalent binary evaluative view according to which ends can be *either* valuable or non-valuable. Given this binary view, if ends are valuable by virtue of justification, then non-justified ends are necessarily non-valuable. But as we have just seen, if ends are non-valuable, then formal justification is futile because it cannot alchemically make them valuable. And if we assume that non-justified ends are valuable, then justification is idle.¹

However, if we conceive of non-justified ends as potentially valuable (rather than just non-valuable), the dilemma starts to dissolve. For on the one hand, we can still hold that non-justified ends are not actually valuable and thus avoid the conclusion that whimsical and compulsive ends (like turning on radios) are actually valuable. On the other hand, formal justifications do not alchemically transform wholly non-valuable ends into values because the non-justified ends are potentially valuable rather than non-valuable.²

We see, then, that the potency-actuality distinction avoids the dilemma's horns. However, one may object that this still doesn't vindicate the integration of this distinction into contemporary ethics. For, so far, my argument has only shown that the potency-actuality distinction is a *possible* solution for the dilemma, not that it is the only one. Moreover, there seems to be another solution: If the dilemma turns on the binary distinction between valuable and non-valuable, then it may be suggested, instead,

¹ One may wonder whether regarding merely desired ends as potentially valuable isn't in fact presupposed by other value formalist accounts. For even if the terminology of potency and actuality is not employed, it would seem that, in some sense, in value-formalism the first level (i.e., the base of construction) consists of potentially valuable ends. These ends are potentially valuable in the sense that they are the kind of entities that *can* become valuable. However, in developing the formalist dilemma, I have shown that the problem is exactly that neither psychologistic value-formalism nor constructivist value-formalism intelligibly accounts for the sense in which merely desired ends *can* become valuable ends if justified; for they are conceived of as either non-valuable or already valuable. Some constructivists, like Sharon Street and Christine Korsgaard, come close to developing a category of 'potentially valuable' where they try to understand desires as "proposals" brought to the tribunal of reason. However, I have argued that unless more is said, viewing desires as "proposals" just obscures the formalist dilemma (see section 2.4). It will soon become clear that developing an account of potentially-valuable ends, is far from trivial and requires a profound revision of value-formalist.

² Consider this analogy: If a shape doesn't consist of triangles, then dividing it into triangles is impossible. On the other hand, if it is a triangle, then dividing it is idle. In this case, we see more clearly that the dilemma can be easily and naturally solved by appealing to potency and activity. A square consists of true triangles in *potency*. By dividing the square, the triangles are in actuality (see Aristotle's *De-Anima* book II).

that value comes in *grades*. According to this suggestion, non-justified ends are not *absolutely* devoid of value, rather they are of *little* value.³ Upon justification, ends acquire more value. Thus, the desire to eat a salad is valuable, even if non-justified. But, it is more valuable if it coheres with other ends.

However, whatever merits the value-gradation solution may have, it cannot help the formalist dilemma; not because it is necessarily wrong, but because it is beside the point. Ethical justification aims at distinguishing between non-valuable and valuable ends, not between ‘more’ or ‘less’ valuable ends. The gradation solution clearly addresses the latter issue, rather than the first. For it states that a justified end is ‘more’ valuable than a non-justified one; not that it is in virtue of ethical justification that an end is of value.

But perhaps one could argue that the distinction between potency and actuality is vulnerable to the same accusation? Perhaps holding that contents are potentially valuable fails to account for ethical justification in the same way as the gradation account? This worry cannot be dispelled without possessing a conception of what is meant by “potentially valuable.” The purpose of the rest of this chapter is to develop such a conception. But before I turn to that, it would be helpful to see, through an analogy, how the potency-actuality distinction, unlike the gradation model, holds promise in overcoming the formalist dilemma.

Consider the analogy of a statue made of rock. The rock stands for non-justified ends, the form of the statue stands for justification, and the statue stands for justified ends (i.e., valuable ends). By analogy to the difficulty at hand, we may ask “what is that by virtue of which the rock is a statue?” On the gradation solution, the rock, prior to being informed through carving, is merely ‘less’ of a statue than after it has been made into an actual statue. What the form of the statue does, on this view, is to *augment* the ‘statue-ness’ already present in the rock. The distinction between ‘less and more’

³ For a suggestion of that kind see Mark Schroder, *Slaves of the Passions*, chapter 5.

simply does not address the question of what makes the rock a statue for, according to it, the rock is a statue, even bereft of the form.

By contrast, the distinction between potency and actuality does address the question: the statue is merely in potency in the rock, and the form of the statue actualizes this potency. This does not mean that the rock is a statue even before it is carved; namely, without the form of the statue. Rather, the rock is a statue by virtue of the form.⁴ In other words, the rock, prior to the work of the sculptor, *can* be a statue (i.e., it potentially a statue) but it is not yet one. The potency is actualized through the sculptor ‘informing’ the rock with a figure.⁵

We see, then, that the ‘gradation’ distinction is irrelevant to the formalist dilemma, and that we have some reason to believe that potency-actuality distinction is relevant: An end valuable merely in potency is not actually valuable, but an end of little value is. Having shown this, we can dismiss the gradation objection and return to our proposal that given the formalist dilemma, value-formalists should conceive of non-justified ends as valuable in potency, and of justification as actualizing their value. I call this view value-actualism.

⁴ I employ here temporal language (i.e., before and after carving) for the sake of clarity, but ideally, this temporal language should be avoided in order to remain neutral as to the kind of form-matter relation at hand. For as stressed by Aryeh Kosman, artifacts manifest two form-matter conceptions: One is that of change (kinesis)—through the work of the sculptor, shaping the rock according to a form, the rock has become a statue. The second relates to *energeia*: that statue being what it is, consists of a matter (rock) formed as a figure. See Aryeh Kosman *The Activity of Being* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013) Both conceptions are relevant to ethics: Kinesis for the transition between potency to first actuality (habituation) and *energeia* to the transition between first actuality and second actuality.

⁵ While the rock without the form is not a statue, it is crucial that it has the *potency* of being a statue. If the rock didn’t have the potency to become a statue, then no amount of work would activate this form.

3.2 Two Difficulties with Value-Actualism

The merit of value actualism is that it shows us a way out of the formalist dilemma, for according to it, justification is neither idle, since without justification ends are not actually valuable, nor is formal justification a case of evaluative alchemy, since it doesn't miraculously transform entirely non-valuable ends into valuable ends but *actualizes* ends that are potentially valuable. However, serious difficulties with "value-actualism" come to light once we descend from the very abstract register of our discussion and consider in more detail what actualization might mean. The main problem is that, without further clarification, the potency-actuality distinction seems more like a terminological sleight of hand than a solution for the formalist dilemma. That dilemma, after all, turned on a difficulty in explicating the way justification can render an end valuable and, so far, I have not shown how distinguishing between value in potency and value in actuality can resolve this difficulty. Indeed, upon closer inspection, it would seem that a variant of the formalist dilemma recurs even if we conceive of justification as actualizing ends that are valuable in potency. I shall now turn to explore this new variant by presenting two fundamental difficulties with value-actualism; each corresponds to another horn of the dilemma.

3.2.1 The Idleness Variant

The first horn of the formalist dilemma was that if we conceive of non-justified ends as valuable, then justification is *idle*. Value-actualism was supposed to resolve the *idleness* difficulty, since, according to it, non-justified ends are not valuable *simpliciter* but, rather, *potentially* valuable. However, once we try to spell out how justification actualizes the potential value of ends, we encounter a new *variant* of the *idleness* difficulty. Consider the following quite common conception of formal justification.

Negative justification: An end is *actually* valuable only if it is consistent with other ends one values. On this conception, the justification is negative; that is, it justifies *not* by producing reasons

that speak *in favor* of an end, but rather, by noting that an end *does not* interfere with other ends. For example, say that Gittel wants to be a policewoman. On a negative justification account, the end of being a policewoman is actually valuable if it doesn't interfere with other ends Gittel values. By contrast, life in the police force would be non-valuable if it turned out that it is incompatible with ends she values, like her longstanding relationship with her delinquent friends.

The trouble here is that an end before and after being negatively justified seems identical to itself; thus, the end of being a policewoman is one and the same end when it interferes with other ends and when it doesn't. Negative justification changes *nothing* in the end. *But* actualization seems to consist in a certain *change*. Consider again our earlier example of the statue: In the process of actualization, the rock goes through a change that actualizes it—it acquires the form of a statue. Following this example, it seems that if justification doesn't change anything in the end, then it is baseless to say that the end became valuable. The difficulty can also be put in the following way: If the end before and after justification is identical, then if the end before justification were valuable in potency, it would remain valuable in potency after justification. Hence, the only way negatively justified ends can be *actually* valuable, is if they are already actually valuable prior to justification.⁶ Therefore, negative justification does not actualize the value of ends; it is *idle* in this respect. To overcome this variant of the idleness difficulty, justification must be understood as positive; specifically, we must see a way in which the end before and after justification isn't entirely identical.⁷

⁶ In the previous chapter, we have explored a related difficulty caused by the negative nature of formal justification. There the difficulty was that negative justification cannot determine what ends are valuable without presupposing some valuable ends and, moreover, it fails to distinguish between meaningless ends (like whims) and valuable ends.

⁷ The difficulty of negative justification is exacerbated against the background of the previous chapter. For there, we have seen that formal principles tend to be negative, and hence, it may seem that formal principle cannot explain the activation of potentially valuable ends. To overcome this difficulty, I will develop in this chapter a formal principle (“organic form”) that supports positive justification.

3.2.2 The Alchemy Variant

Again, as I noted before, value-actualism also encounters a variant of the other horn of the formalist dilemma, namely, the evaluative alchemy problem. The original problem was that if ends are non-evaluative, there is no reason to think that they become valuable if they cohere with each other. I argued that this difficulty is resolved if we assume that non-justified ends are *potentially* valuable, rather than non-valuable. However, a related problem arises instead: According to value rationalists, to be valuable is to be justified; or in other words, valuable ends are *essentially* justified. But if the essence of value rests in justification, in what sense are non-justified ends valuable in potency? What entitles us to consider ends as potentially valuable rather than non-valuable?

Unless more is said, insisting that non-justified ends are valuable in *potency* will seem like a matter of empty terminology. And this will lead us back to the difficulty of evaluative alchemy, since if potentially valuable ends are valueless, then their coherence with each other cannot metamorphose them into valuable ends. Therefore, an account of *potentially* valuable ends ought to show how they are like actually valuable ends and *unlike* non-evaluative attitudes. In other words, we need to show that actually and potentially valuable ends share an essence. The task, then, is to account for the evaluative nature of potentially valuable ends.⁸

Now, one might wonder: Why isn't it enough to say that non-justified ends are *potentially* valuable because they *can* be justified? Isn't it enough to say that a rock is a statue in potency because it *can* be made into a statue? The answer, I argue, is that no, it isn't enough; because in the case of a rock (and artifacts more generally), the potency to become a statue is merely *accidental*, while in the

⁸ In the face of this difficulty and the previous difficulty, it should be clear that merely saying that desired ends are 'potentially' valuable is insufficient. Hence, the potency-actuality framework cannot be a 'fix' added onto existing value-formalist accounts, such as the ones we considered in the previous chapter. Thus, the notion that desired ends can be understood as 'proposals,' in itself, does not establish a sufficient conception of potentially valuable ends. Without resolving the above difficulties, we cannot consider the potency-actuality framework as a solution to the formalist dilemma.

case of potentially valuable ends, potency must be understood not accidentally but *essentially*. Further understanding the distinction between accidental and essential potency will shed light on why only *essential* potency is relevant to our investigation; for that sake, consider the following example of potency in the case of an artifact:

Consider a chunk of copper before it is made into a pot; what this chunk is, *essentially*, is copper. Yet, at the same time, this copper chunk is also a pot *in potency*; and it is *actually* a pot once the blacksmith forges it into a pot. Now, notice that, even when it is a pot, the copper chunk retains the form of copper.⁹ More accurately, the *matter* of the pot retains its coppery form and this form is different from the form of a pot. Another way of putting the same point is that there is a sense in which the copper chunk, even when shaped as a pot, is still copper. As such, it still has the properties of copper, and from this perspective, the shape that makes it a pot is accidental. Accordingly, we may say that the artifact's form (e.g., pot) is accidental for its matter (e.g., copper), and hence, in general, the potency of something to become an artifact is accidental as well.¹⁰

Now, here is the worry: If non-justified and justified ends relate to each other like a copper chunk and a copper pot, then it follows that the essence of a non-justified end and the essence of a justified end are not the same. On this 'artifact actualization' model, even when we justify ends, they retain their original non-valuable form, like the copper retains its form when it is shaped as a pot. On this model, saying that non-justified ends are potentially valuable would mean that being justified (and hence, valuable) is accidental to them; and even if they are justified, in some sense, they subsist as non-justified ends.

⁹ I shifted from discussing 'essence' to discussing 'form' since, strictly speaking, artifacts are accidental beings and have no essence. Cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 8.2. and Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 92-104. Note that my discussion has no exegetical intentions. I appeal to Aristotelian insights merely in so far as they throw light on the questions at hand.

¹⁰ My discussion here is influenced by Kosman's work on Aristotle's metaphysics. See, Kosman, *The Activity of Being*, 93-104.

But if that is so, then a variant of the evaluative alchemy-difficulty emerges. Because if non-justified ends are not *essentially* valuable, it follows that formal justification is futile. For even if ends cohere with each other, they retain their prior non-justified and, hence, non-valuable essence. The lesson to be drawn from this variant of the evaluative alchemy difficulty, then, is that non-justified ends and justified ends must not relate to each other like a copper chunk and the pot made out of it. The same end, justified and non-justified, must have the same essence (i.e., what it is); to be *potentially* valuable must be similar to what it is to be *actually* valuable. Therefore, if justification is essential to valuable ends, as value-rationalists maintain, it must also be essential to ends prior to justification.

3.3 The Living Body of Ends: Toward a Satisfying Value-Actualism

Let us summarize our discussion of the two difficulties confronting value-actualism. First, we saw that negative justification leads to the idleness-difficulty and therefore, if justification is to establish value-actualization, it must be positive. Second, we saw that the actualization of the value of ends cannot be modelled on artifact actualization, since the form of the artifact is merely accidental to its matter (it is accidental for the copper to be shaped as a pot); hence, justification must be *essential* to ends that are valuable in potency. Therefore, an account of value actualization must meet two requirements: (1) Justification must be conceived as positive, rather than negative and (2) actualization must be conceived as *essential*, rather than *accidental*.

The problem is that each of these requirements raises serious challenges. I shall first present what I consider to be the two most serious challenges and then proceed to sketch a solution. The prime difficulty in accounting for positive justification is the risk of vicious regress. The regress arises from the need to positively justify each valuable end. If each end must be positively justified, it means that another end (or some other contentful reason) must speak in its favor. This would seem to

generate an infinite regress of justifying ends, which, if not downright vicious, is yet entirely implausible given our finite nature; what would it even mean for an agent to have an infinite number of ends? But then, to avoid an infinite regress, justifications must either be circular or come to an end with a non-justified (and hence, non-valuable) end. *Prima facie*, both of these solutions are not very promising.

Matters are even worse with regard to the second requirement, namely, the requirement that the actualization must be essential, rather than accidental. For, if potentially valuable ends have the same essence as actually valuable ends, it follows that they are both essentially justified. However, at the same time, according to value-formalism, potentially valuable ends are, by definition, non-justified—indeed, this is what makes them merely *potentially* valuable. But this entails the following apparently contradictory characterization: Potentially valuable ends are both non-justified by definition and justified in their essence.

In the rest of this paper, I shall propose that there is a hope of overcoming this twofold difficulty, if we model value-actualization on actualization of essential capacities of living beings. More specifically, what I propose is that potentially valuable ends are analogous in important respects to incipient organs, that is, organs prior to their being fully developed.¹¹ The first thing to notice, is that the development of a living organ exhibits what we have just called ‘essential actualization.’ In the process of developing, an organ acquires the very properties that make it *what it is*; namely, its essential properties. These are properties it may entirely lack in early stages of the development, but, nonetheless, they are *essential* properties. Thus, in early stages of its development, the embryonic eyes

¹¹ Two important remarks on the method of the following argument: First, note that I use the case of living organ only as an analogy and a model that may be used to enrich the way we think about potency, actualization, and justification with regard to human ends. This analogical method is important to note since I am not going to derive *any* conclusion concerning human values from the normativity of organisms, as some neo-Aristotelians have attempted. Second, though my argument will draw heavily on the Aristotelian tradition, it is by no means an attempt at Aristotelian exegesis (indeed, at some points I certainly deviate from Aristotle’s views on the generation of organism).

do not actually ‘see,’ or more accurately, the embryo, though it has incipient eyes, does not see. Yet, seeing is what makes the embryonic eyes what they are—they are the organs of sight. We may say, then, that though they do not see, the essence of embryonic eyes is seeing. Moreover, similar to a potentially valuable end that as such lacks justification, it is *by definition* that the embryonic eye does not actually see; just as the first lacks justification, the latter lacks seeing. Through the process of development, if nothing goes wrong, the potency to see is gradually actualized.

What transpires, then, is that the development of incipient organs conforms to the above characterization of essential actualization: An embryonic eye is, by essence, the organ of seeing, and by definition, it cannot see; seeing is actualized through the healthy developmental process. But here, unlike in the case of the actualization of potentially valuable ends, the characterization does not strike one as conceptually implausible, let alone as contradictory. Indeed, it is quite a natural description of the development of organs. The actualization of an end’s value can be described in a similar manner: A *potentially* valuable end should be understood as being on its way to actualization, through a process of justification. In other words, to make sense of essential actualization, we ought to conceive of the notion of ‘potentially valuable end’ in a teleological manner (i.e., in relation to its fully developed nature as a justified end). Conceived in this way, there is no contradiction in being, at the same time, essentially justified and not-(yet)-justified. If we can see essential-actualization as unproblematic in the case of incipient organs why, then, should we be reluctant to see it as unproblematic in the case of potentially valuable ends?

One central reason for such reluctance is that while we understand, in general, how embryonic organs develop into fully-fledged organs, we do not yet have a clear grasp of an equivalent notion of development in the case of potentially valuable ends. All we know, is that an end’s value is actualized through a process of *positive* justification. But, as of yet, we do not have a plausible notion of positive justification. Indeed, as I noted above, acquiring an account of positive justification in a way that does

not generate a vicious regress was one of the two main difficulties value-actualism must overcome. Hence, in order to adopt the organic model of essential actualization, we need a conception of positive justification.

Interestingly, we need not go much farther for such a conception. A closer look into the developmental process of organs will provide us with a useful model for positive justification. Let us return again to the development of an eye. Ocular development involves a great number of stages of bio-chemical processes of astounding complexity. But the same developmental processes can also be described functionally. These are the processes through which the eye gains its full function, that is seeing; and seeing, for creatures like us, is inseparable from other functions and activities. Thus, seeing is functionally involved in perceiving, in forming beliefs, in becoming aware of objects of desire, in conceiving salient reasons for action, and in orienting our bodily movements. The essence of the human eye (i.e., seeing) consists of the eye's functions in the aforementioned activities; and, crucially, it is through its developmental process that the eye is formed in a way that allows it to fully *actualize* its various functions. Hence, the developmental process comprises a number of stages that can be understood functionally—as connecting to other organs in a way that allows the eye to perform its essential functions. Thus, to function in perception, the eye develops along with, and in connection to, the visual cortex, in which image processing occurs. To serve its function in proprioception the eye is developed along, and connected to, the motoric centers in the brain and also to the ocular motor system that coordinates and moves the eyes.

For our purposes, it is of special significance that in articulating the essence of the eye, we appeal to other vital activities and organs. The eye is not exceptional in that respect. The essences of organs are determined through their function in the system of vital activities that constitute the living individual and the species to which that individual belongs. The essence of organs, therefore, is understood in relation to the life activities they further and sustain and to the totality of life activities.

Accordingly, incipient organs are actualized through a process of connecting, in the right way, to other organs and being formed in a way that allows them to perform their function. But, how can this holistic functional model serve to elucidate positive justification?

The first thing to note is that the functional relations we have considered can be formulated in a teleological manner. Thus, the heart's function of pumping blood to the rest of the body can be described in the following teleological manner: the heart pumps blood for the sake of distributing oxygen to the rest of the body; moreover, other organs' oxygen requirements determine what it is for the heart to function well (or healthily). The second thing to notice is that teleology is tied up with a form of justification. The following justificatory link holds between relata of a teleological nexus: If x-ing is for the sake of y-ing then we may also say that y-ing justifies x-ing. Thus, we may say that the distribution of oxygen to the body's organs justifies the pumping of the heart.¹² Moreover, the specific oxygen needs of other organs justify the particular *way* in which the heart pumps blood on different occasions. Thus, what justifies the intense pumping of my heart in the unlikely event of running, is that the muscles involved in running consume an extraordinary amount of energy. It is this exceptional physical activity that justifies the exceptionally intense pumping. Thirdly, this kind of justification is *positive* rather than merely negative. Namely, it does not merely *indicate* that one organic activity does not interfere with another but discloses the *manner* in which one activity furthers and supports other activities; these are factors that speak in favor of the activity, and hence, they constitute *positive* justifications. Finally, the essential activities of organs support and sustain each other *holistically*. Just as the heart supports the activity of other organs, other organs also sustain the activity of the heart; for example, the many organs involved in digestion provide the heart with the nutrients that are

¹² In speaking of justification in the non-rational organic realm I do not mean to imply any fantastic rational consciousness of organs. Rather, my point here is that in teleological structure on relata indicates something like the 'point' in the activity of the other. When teleological activity is of a rational conscious being, it consists of justifications in the (non-borrowed) accurate sense.

required for its healthy functioning. The organisms' and the species' vital activities constitute together a holistic system of mutual support and sustenance. Seen from the other direction, these essential organic activities positively justify each other. What transpires is a holistic system of positive justifications that are constitutive of the essences of the members (organs) of the system. I will call this form of justification—organic justification.

What's significant about organic justification in our attempts to account for positive justification is that it neither seems to generate a vicious regress (circular or infinite), nor to cease at a non-justified activity or end. It appears like a benign form of positive justification. In other words, the fact that organic activities positively justify each other does not seem to raise any special difficulty. Nothing seems problematic in saying that the heart supports the digestion system and vice versa; and, accordingly, that each positively justifies the other's activity. Therefore, organic justification provides us with a model for *positive* justification. Now, if this model does not generate difficulties in the case of a living being, why should matters differ where it is applied in the case of valuable ends?

Let us, then, consider organic justification in the case of potentially valuable ends. An end is organically justified if it belongs to a system of ends analogous to a system of essential organic activities. Ends belonging to this kind of system support each other holistically. In supporting and furthering each other holistically, ends also *positively* justify each other. Consider the following example: Stanley is a philosopher. Studying philosophy is one of Stanley's ends. Engaging and enjoying his friendship with Philippa is another end of Stanley's. Now, these two ends are mutually furthering and supporting. His philosophical work furthers his relationship with Philippa, as it provides him with fascinating matters to discuss with her and with insight about what it is to be a good friend. On the other hand, Stanley's friendship with Philippa also furthers and supports his philosophical investigations through the rich and insightful conversations they have. Accordingly, we may say that friendship and philosophizing justify each other. His philosophizing speaks in favor of his friendship

with Philippa and vice versa. We could go on to describe how his vocation and his friendship support Stanley's family life, his communal life and his hobbies, and so on and so forth. Together these ends constitute an "organically formed"¹³ system of positive justification.

We can now see whether organic justification of ends allows us to overcome the difficulties we encountered earlier with positive justification. Organic justification clearly avoids two pitfalls we mentioned: it neither requires an infinite nexus of justifying ends, nor does it come to a halt with a non-justified end. Since the members of organic justification justify each other holistically, there is neither a need to assume an infinite number of members, nor that justification ceases with an unjustified member. However, it seems that these two pitfalls are avoided only by virtue of another form of vicious regress—namely circular regress. After all, it is by virtue of members justifying *each other* that organic justification doesn't fall prey to the above pitfalls. But if members justify each other, this seems to imply circular justification; and such justification may strike one as potentially problematic. For if an end (e.g., sustaining my friendships) is valuable by virtue of being justified, then circular justification entails that, ultimately, after completing the circle of justifications, an end is valuable by virtue of justifying itself. Thus, it would follow that friendship is valuable because it furthers and sustains itself; and this conclusion seems absurd. How can an end be the source of its own value? If justification renders an end actually valuable, how can these justification stem from this very end?

What should give us hope to overcome this difficulty is that the circularity of justification, in the case of organic activities, does not strike us as vicious. That the heart's pumping is justified by the digestion system and digestion is justified by the heart's activities, does not seem problematic. The reason for this has to do with the nature of organic justification as actualizing rather than transmitting

¹³ By "organic form" I shall denote the formal principle of my view (organic holism).

properties between *relata*. To see how the difficulty of vicious circularity is avoided, consider the circularity of justification, but this time with regard to organs, rather than ends. If the problem with circularity in the case of ends was that an end is the source of its own actual value, the analogous difficulty in the case of organs would be that an organ is the source of its own actuality, namely, its mature healthy functioning. For just as it is by virtue of justifications that the value of ends is actualized, so it is by virtue of organic teleological relations¹⁴ that organs' essence is fully developed. But note that this absurdity arises only if we view the teleological relation as endowing an organ with something it lacks. For in this case, it will follow that an organ is the ultimate source of a something it does not possess (namely, its fully developed functioning).

But this is clearly a confusion. Teleological relations do not transmit anything to an organ that it does not already possess. Indeed, a central point of our discussion was to stress that the teleological relations *actualize* what the organ already has potentially—namely, teleological relations actualize an organ's essence. Thus, 'seeing' is not something the embryonic eye does not have; it is not something transmitted to it by other organic activities to which the eye is teleologically related. Indeed, if this were the case, there was no point in saying that the embryonic eye sees in *potency*. Teleological relations, then, do not transmit 'seeing' onto the eye; rather, they *actualize* the embryonic eye's potential to see. The eye is potentially the kind of organ that stands in certain teleological relations with other organs; and it is by actually standing in these relations that the eye's potency is actualized. Accordingly, teleological relations, and the corresponding justifications, do not transmit a property but, rather, actualize a potential property. It is for that reason that circularity among organic justification is not vicious: no property (like 'essence' or 'value') is transmitted in justification and, hence, the absurd scenario in which a member is the source of a property that it lacks does not hold in organic

¹⁴ Such relations can also be seen as analogous to justifications as we noted above.

justification. Thus, while it holds that the eye is teleologically related to itself (through the teleological system of organs), this circularity, rather than being vicious is, if anything, a token of the robustness of the organic nexus.

But why shouldn't circular justification also be benign in the case of ends? After all, on value-actualism, justifications do not *transmit* value to ends that are otherwise bereft of value; rather, justifications *actualize* ends' *potential* value. Indeed, that is the core principle of value-actualism. Potentially valuable ends are, in their essence, organically justified. Being *actually* organically justified renders ends actually valuable. Having shown that we can overcome the pitfall of circular regress of justification, it transpires that organic justification can serve as a model for positive justification by virtue of which ends are rendered *actually* justified.¹⁵

Let us take stock of our argument: We turned to reflect on the actualization of organs in order to address two difficulties with value-actualism: The apparent contradictory nature of essential actualization and the worry of vicious regress of positive justification. Through our reflection on actualization of organs, we acquired promising ways to overcome both difficulties: Just as there is no contradiction in saying that the embryonic eye is both a non-seeing and an essentially seeing organ, there is no contradiction in the claim that a potentially valuable end is both non-justified and essentially justified. Moreover, as we have just seen, the form of teleological holistic support between organs can serve as a model for positive justification that does not lead to a vicious regress. We concluded that potentially valuable ends are actualized by organic justification—that is, organic justification is the justification by virtue of which ends are rendered valuable—in other words, it is ethical justification. The rest of the dissertation is dedicated to this account, which I call *organic holism*.

¹⁵ Notice that here I just argued, through the analogy with organs, that the notion organic justification does not *necessarily* imply vicious circularity. However, it may still be the case that evaluative organic justification (i.e., justifications that actualize potentially valuable ends) are circularity vicious. In the next chapter, I will argue that the circularity of evaluative organic justification is benign.

3.4 Formal Potency and the Breaking of the Organic Analogy

The analogy between potentially valuable ends and incipient organs—like every analogy—breaks at some point. The task of this section is to examine whether the differences between ends and organs render our account of value-actualization problematic. The most troubling difference is that teleological justifications in the case of organs are *contentful*, while in value-formalism, justifications are, by definition, *formal*. This is a significant and relevant difference. After all, if we extract the contents from the essentially teleological connections of organs, we are left with no understanding of these organs. Thus, what remains of the essence of the eye if we abstract all the functions in which the mature eye is involved, namely, if we abstract from the content of the justifications? Our discussion above indicated that what remains is not enough to understand what seeing is. But if that is so, isn't the immediate consequence that, on my proposal, we cannot conceive of what a valuable end is, since justifications of ends are, in principle, without content, namely, formal? I would argue that while the formality of justification indeed constitutes a significant break from the organic-analogy, it is not only non-problematic, but renders *organic holism* even more attractive, since it leaves room for the ethical imagination and adaptation that are integral to human experience.

We first need to be clear on the sense in which evaluative justification, on my account, is *formal* at all; for this is far from being obvious. In some sense, evaluative justification *is* contentful. Indeed, it must be. For, on my proposal, justification has an “organic form,” which means that what justify ends are *other ends* (namely, contents). Thus, we saw that Stanley's justification for his friendship with Philippa are other ends of his, like his philosophical work, his family life, and his community. These are clearly contentful justifications, analogical to the teleological justifications of the eye by other

organic activities in which it partakes. What then is formal about evaluative organic justification? In what sense is it more formal than justification in the case of organs?

The difference comes out if we compare the justificatory essence of organs and ends. The justifications that actualize organs are predetermined—they are part of the organ's essence. This means that even when organs are in their embryonic state, it is determined what kind of contentful justifications they shall have, once fully actualized. Thus, as we have seen before, the essence of the eye consists of *contentful* justifications; its essential activities are justified by other vital activities in which a mature healthy eye participates (like desiring, and perceiving). These justifications are predetermined for the embryonic eye.¹⁶ In other words, the embryonic organ's potency consists of *contentful* justifications.

By contrast, an end's potency to be valuable does not include *contentful* justifications. To be clear, as we have seen in the previous section, a potentially valuable end has the potency to be justified by other ends in an organic manner; but by *what ends* and in *what ways* is undetermined before the end is actually valuable. We may say then, that unlike embryonic organs, the potency of ends to be valuable, consists of justifications only in a *formal* sense;¹⁷ the contents of these justifications are undetermined. Now, the tricky bit is that once an end is *actually* valuable, it *is* justified by other ends and, hence, actual justifications are *contentful*. Accordingly, we see the sense in which potentially valuable ends have the potency to be justified only in a *formal* sense. We know that, if actualized, it will be justified organically (and therefore, contentfully), but the content of the justification is undetermined.

¹⁶ It may be noted that according to value-actualism, it is not so clear that the justifications of *human organs* are predetermined. After all, the proper functions of our organs are partly determined through our ends, and these ends are not predetermined, according to value-actualism. For example, while my legs are perfectly healthy for the life of a present day academic, they are seriously too weak to support a hunter-gatherer. Hence, the organic analogy is most helpful where we consider organs of non-rational species.

¹⁷ Specifically, it is the potency to be justified organically; or in other words, to be part of a system of organic justifications.

Now that we have explicated the sense in which evaluative justification, unlike justification in the case of organs, is formal, we are equipped to ask whether this disanalogy raises any difficulty. In itself, the idea that something may be formal in potency and contentful in actuality does not seem problematic. If not always, at least in many cases, actualization of potencies involves a transition from the more formal to the more contentful. Thus, a human newborn's potency for language acquisition is formal; it is the potency to speak in general, rather than the potency to speak any specific language like English, Arabic, or Hebrew. By contrast, the *acquisition* of language (i.e., the first actualization of the potency to speak) is contentful. The infant acquires a specific language (or specific languages) with its characteristic contents. Hence, through language acquisition, the formal potency to speak becomes a *contentful* (first) actuality.

While the idea that something may be formal in potency and contentful in actuality is unproblematic, it may still raise difficulties in the case of the actualization of valuable ends. Especially troubling is the following difficulty: Doesn't the formal character of evaluative justification entail that we cannot recognize ends before they are justified and actualized? If an end is undetermined before actualization, it would entail that we cannot justly consider a toddler's emerging interest in human companionship to be tied with her future pursuit of friendship. Rather, we have to consider it as an inclination whose future value is yet to be determined. But we certainly *do* conceive of such an inclination as linked to the valuable end of friendship. That an inchoate end cannot be justly conceived as a potency for a specific valuable end seems, then, to contradict our common-sense understanding of inchoate ends as fledgling versions of known well-developed ends.

Moreover, the undeterminedness of inchoate ends is unparalleled in other realms we have considered before. By comparison, we know what an organ is (e.g., an eye) by virtue of the teleological connections it shall have, if it develops healthily. Without knowing its various future functions, we cannot recognize a certain embryonic organ as an eye or a heart. It would seem ridiculous to speak of

an ‘undetermined’ or ‘general’ organ.¹⁸ Moreover, here the analogy to language also does not help. For it seems equally absurd to speak of words or sentences that have *undetermined-general* meanings. Once language acquisition begins, it is always a *specific* language that is being acquired, and the meanings of words and sentences are determined accordingly. We see, then, that both the analogy to organs and the analogy to language strengthen the sense that the notion of *undetermined* potentially valuable ends is absurd.

I will now argue that the undeterminedness of ends, as entailed by organic holism, is compatible with our common sense, as long as we take into consideration two assumptions concerning human nature; both assumptions are very fundamental and relatively uncontested: (1) *natural inclinations*: human infants normally share a set of basic inclinations, such as the inclinations for warmth and love, companionship, eating and drinking, etc. (2) *Habituation*: Human beings are habituated by their caretaker into a human form of life. As I’ll now show, these two characteristics of human nature restrict the possible ways in which inchoate ends may develop, and it is by virtue of this restriction that the undeterminedness of inchoate ends (as entailed by organic holism) is reconciled with common sense.¹⁹

First, while a potentially valuable end is undetermined until it is actually justified, note that the possible determinations are somewhat restricted. This is because, according to organic holism, what determines ends are justifications given by other ends, and hence, the possible determinations of ends are restricted by the agent’s other ends. Now, as we have just noted, since human infants normally share a similar set of inclinations, the possible determinations of their inclinations are similarly restricted. That human natural inclinations restrict the developmental horizons of infantile

¹⁸ Stem-cells may be viewed as an interesting counterexample for this assertion.

¹⁹ It is important to note that in introducing these assumptions on human nature into value-actualism, I do not sneak normativity through the backdoor. For I will neither claim that ends are valuable because they belong to the set of “natural human inclinations,” nor because they were brought about through habituation. I will say more on this point in chapter 5.

inclinations, justifies (to a certain extent) our common-sense understanding of infantile inclinations as inchoate versions of a valuable ends.

Consider the following example: Toddlers are *naturally* inclined to seek the company of their peers. Hence, we may say that they normally have the inchoate end of seeking their peers' company. According to organic holism, this end (seeking the peers' company) is potentially valuable and if everything goes right, it will develop into an actually valuable end by being integrated with and justified by other ends. Among these ends are ones *naturally* pursued by toddlers, such as eating, seeking love and warmth, playing, and exploring one's environment. The integration of these inchoate ends into an organic whole determines, to a certain extent, the character each end once it is justified and valuable. Thus, the toddler's pursuit of his peers' company is evaluatively actualized through furthering and sustaining other 'natural' inchoate ends, like playing and seeking love and warmth. In furthering and sustaining these other ends, the inclination to seek others' company obtains the characteristics we associate with the virtue of friendships. Friends play with each other (and later, engage together in pleasurable activities), they support each other's emotional life, including the need for love, and they explore together possible pursuits and activities, like travelling, political activism, and philosophizing.

This example begins to show in what way our initial natural inclinations delimit the possibilities of the actualization of inchoate ends, to the point that we are justified in judging that the toddler's inclinations are inchoate versions of familiar valuable ends (such as friendship). Our judgment is further corroborated by the fact that human infants are *habituated* by their caretakers into a certain kind of human life form: The gradual integration of an infant's ends into an organic whole are neither arbitrary, nor are they subject only to the infant's discretion. Rather, it is through the instruction and supervision of the toddler's various caretakers, as well as through the examples provided to her by many others, that the toddler gradually integrates her ends. Moreover, it is through the encouragement, discouragement, and the stimulations she receives that the toddler acquires interest in some ends and

loses interest in others. The toddler is habituated into the thick network of involvements and pursuits characteristic of a certain form of life (or culture), and if things go well, the ends she will pursue as an adult are the valuable ends characteristic of this form of life. By virtue of habituation, then, it is not accidental that the toddler's interest in her peers develops into the virtue of friendship. Indeed, it is the *aim* of good caregivers to form this inchoate interest in the peer's company into what we recognize as the virtue of friendship.

We see, then, that once we introduce to organic holism two basic assumptions about human nature (i.e., the *natural inclinations* and *habituation* assumptions), we can reconcile the undeterminedness of potentially valuable ends with our common-sense understanding of inchoate ends as versions of familiar valuable ends. It is only when we abstract from human nature that an inchoate end is undetermined in a way that disallows its association with any specific actually valuable end.

3.5 Organic Holism and Common-Sense

We have seen that the formality of organic holism does not contradict our common-sense. But reflection on our common-sense judgments raises an even more fundamental difficulty with organic holism: On the face of it, common-sense speaks against the very notion that inchoate ends are *potentially* valuable, rather than actually valuable; namely, against the very potency-activity distinction that is the core tenet of organic holism. This is perspicuous in two kinds of cases: First, we seem to consider even emerging ends as already actually valuable. Thus, where infants desire food, we recognize in this desire the valuable end of feeding; and when toddlers seek the company of their peers, we recognize the valuable end of friendship.²⁰ Second, we seem to consider some emerging

²⁰ That is, we consider the toddler's pursuit not merely as what can become, in the future, the valuable end of friendship but rather, as actual pursuit of friendship.

ends as having no value at all, not even *in potency*. Thus, turning radios on does not strike us even as *potentially* valuable; we recognize *nothing* of value in such an end. If we truly recognize the value of ends, or the lack thereof, upon their emergence, as the examples above suggest, this would undermine organic holism's claim that inchoate or emerging ends are merely *potentially* valuable.

In this section, I will defend organic holism against this objection in two steps. First, I'll show that when we call emerging ends valuable, we speak loosely; strictly speaking, they should be considered as potentially valuable.²¹ In the second step, I will argue that inchoate ends that may strike us as not even potentially valuable, like the radio-man example, *are*, in fact, potentially valuable. To show that organic holism is compatible with our common-sense judgments, it is useful to consider a concrete example of an inchoate end and a couple of possible scenarios of its development:

When Harry met Sally: Harry is a toddler. Lately, he has started to express interest in another toddler in his nursery—Sally. His interest is manifested in a motley of behaviors. Thus, he shows a special liking to Sally's favorite toys and he often seeks her company. The two toddlers sometimes play together but at other times, they seem hostile to each other. It is also noticed that Harry sometimes cries if Sally is taken away from him; he also tends to cry when Sally takes one of his toys.

Now, loosely speaking, we may say that Harry and Sally are friends. But more strictly speaking, what we behold here is the beginning of something—potentially a friendship. If everything goes well for both toddlers, they will one day become friends, in the full and valuable sense of the concept. But, for now, what we see is very far from adult friendship. Indeed, for now, we still don't know what days will bring and the inchoate interest Harry shows in Sally may still go many ways, not all of which we would consider friendly or otherwise valuable. Imagining ways in which things may go awry for Harry,

²¹ As will emerge through this section, we may also speak of values in various stages in their actualization.

while surely an unpleasant exercise, should be helpful in seeing that it is wrong to see his infantile tendency as already being a valuable friendship.²²

Scenario 1 – abusive patterns: One very unfortunate scenario is that Harry’s attachment to Sally, and later to other kids, turns into an abusive tendency. Thus, he might develop a habit of attaching himself to kids who treat him badly. Such attachments would be a source of constant humiliation, self-loathing and an impediment on his other pursuits. If these patterns continue into adulthood, they may result in relationships we would never describe as friendships, let alone valuable friendship; in this scenario, Harry grows into a person who lacks the potency for friendship, in any valuable sense of this term.

Scenario 2 – arrested development: As he grows up, Harry still shows interest in his peers, but his interest remains underdeveloped and isolated from his other activities and pursuits. As a result, his interactions with his peers are impoverished and shallow. As an adult, his relations to people around him are neither enriching, nor enriched by pursuits such as his career as an engineer, his meditative practice, his political involvements, and family life. Surely, he does have relationships with other people in so far as they are necessary for his other pursuits. However, the value of such relationships is derivative of the pursuits they further. Accordingly, Harry’s relations with people, who aren’t his family members, is either merely instrumental or involve empty and meaningless gestures. The latter, are the ossified vestiges of his infantile inclination to be interested and to get attached to other human beings; the same inclination that once drew him to Sally.

²² My use of epistemological terms such as ‘knowing’ and ‘imagining’ may suggest that value actualism concerns the epistemology of value. However, it is important to stress that the claims of value actualism are metaphysical; they concern the question, “What are valuable ends (limited, for now, to their subjective aspect)?” The reason for the epistemological language of this section is that I address objections that arise from our common-sense understanding and, in particular, from common ways of speaking about emerging ends.

Scenario 3 – healthy development: The same infantile inclination, under favorable conditions, can develop into mature friendships and the potency to sustain and enjoy them. On my account, under such favorable conditions, the interest in peers will gradually be integrated with other central inclinations and pursuits of Harry's. In this case, friendships will constitute a central part of his life that sustains and informs other domains of his life.

This exercise in imagining developmental scenarios was conducted in order to bring home the following point: It is wrong to consider inchoate ends (which are the objects of infantile inclinations) to be *already* valuable, though we sometimes speak that way. Thus, we've seen that the infantile inclination to be interested in and attached to other people is not (yet) the pursuit of friendship, and hence, it is not *yet* actually valuable. It surely can develop into a valuable end, if it integrates with other ends, in an organic system of furthering and supporting ends. But this can go wrong in various ways so as to eventuate in ossified, isolated, and meaningless inclinations (scenario 2); or even worse, in deformed and harmful inclinations (scenario 1). What explains our tendency to speak about inchoate ends as if they are already valuable is that we justly associate them with the valuable ends to which they will hopefully develop²³—namely, as being valuable ends *in potency*, as organic holism states.

Finally, I will now defend organic holism against the charge that sometimes we recognize emerging ends as not valuable at all, not even *in potency*. As you would recall, one of the main motivations of this dissertation is to distinguish valuable ends from what I called bizire scenarios, namely, cases in which agents pursue final ends that are lacking any value, such as turning-on radios for no further end or counting blades of grass for no ulterior motive. Facing such cases, some philosophers infer that desiring an end cannot explain the end's value and therefore, valuable ends must also be justified. Such philosophers endorse the kind of view I called value-rationalism. Since

²³ How this association is possible in organic holism, has been explained in the previous section.

organic holism is a species of this view, it would seem that it must be compatible with the judgment that some ends, like bizires, are of no value at all. But according to organic holism, the objection goes, such ends, like every other ends, are *potentially* valuable (at least upon emerging).

The answer to this objection is complex. I will first show that, strictly speaking, bizires should be seen as potentially valuable. Then I will explain why, speaking more loosely, we are usually justified in not seeing them as even potentially valuable. As a first step, consider the following example:

Radio-baby: Rivka is a developmentally normal three-year-old toddler. Beside the characteristic activities and interest of her age group, she shows a peculiar tendency to turn on radios around her. When asked if she does it for the music, she says no (what kid nowadays would?!), she also doesn't seem to enjoy turning on radios and, clearly, she doesn't do it to check the technical condition of her household appliances. Rather than considering her peculiar tendency as valueless, Rivka's parents see in it a potential interest in technology and a sign of curiosity. Amused by the peculiarity, they nonetheless entertain their future visits to the science and technology museum and consider other means to nurture her tendency.

We see, then, that what seems absurd and valueless in the case of the radio-man, is different when we consider the radio-baby's case. Here, the tendency to turn on radios seems potentially valuable. And like other potentially valuable ends, it may grow into an actually valuable end, if integrated with Rivka's other ends. Indeed, it would seem like an unfortunate lack of imagination, on her parents' part if they were to judge Rivka's tendency as a meaningless whim. Moreover, the radio-on bizire is not exceptional; each of the famous bizire scenarios would yield the same result, once modified so that its protagonist is a toddler. Thus, the grass-counting toddler may show an inclination

for mathematics and the wall-licking baby might have a special gustatory sensitivity and interest that can developed into the pursuit of a culinary career (though, calcium deficit might be the reason).²⁴

Note that I do not contest the claim that we tend to see bizires as not valuable at all, just as I did not contest the claim that we tend to consider some inchoate ends (like Harry's interest in Sally) as already valuable. Rather, my claim is that in both cases, we judge or speak loosely, while, strictly speaking in both cases, ends are *potentially* valuable. One may ask now "if, strictly speaking, both cases are similar, why, then, in one case do we judge ends to be of no value, and in the other, we consider them as actually valuable?" I have already provided one part of the answer; since I showed that we justly associate some inchoate ends with actually valuable ends we are familiar with (like valuable friendship). As a result, we tend to 'see' in such inchoate ends the actual value they would have if they develop properly. The other part of the answer is a mirror image of the first: Since, some inclinations, like bizires, are uncommon, it requires an imaginary effort to see into what kinds of actually valuable ends they can develop. In bizire cases, our way of life does not make readily accessible the ways in which these ends can integrate with other ends and be evaluatively actualized.

This also helps to explain why the original bizire scenarios, in which the protagonist is not a toddler, seem much more decidedly absurd than the modified ones. For while toddlers' ends are generally undeveloped and inchoate, adults' ends generally are, more or less, formed. Hence, where an adult pursues a non-justified and unintegrated end (like the radioman) it is striking, and in the

²⁴ Here is an objection: My argument fails because the "infant-bizires" are, in a crucial way, unlike the original bizires cases. What characterized the original cases was that there was *absolutely* no justification for what the agent aims at. But, in the infant cases there is; namely, it is justified by the way the inclination can integrate with other life activities through habituation. Thus, radio-baby's inclination is justified by the (future) furthering of her career; by contrast, radio-man's inclination is utterly unjustified. This is a crucial difference because my argument was supposed to show that all inclinations (even bizires) are potentially valuable, and if the objection holds, it implies that I have not shown that every inclination is potentially valuable. However, this objection is based an illicit change of perspective from internal to external conception of justification. Throughout this work, I have been considering justification internally, namely, from the *agential viewpoint*. From this viewpoint, radio-baby's inclination isn't justified—she does not have the resources to justify her inclinations since her desired ends are not yet formed in a way that they justify each other. That her inclination can become justified from her own viewpoint, is something her *caretakers* can see, and habituate accordingly. If successful, Rivka will develop in a way that this inclination is justified from her own viewpoint.

absence of a special explanation, the end would seem absurd. Moreover, it is also harder in the case of adults to imagine ways in which bizires can be integrated into the already established system of ends. Adults' ends, unlike toddlers', are already determined to a large extent and, hence, allow less flexibility and leeway in integrating new ends. Thus, it is hard to imagine what the end of counting grass can develop into in the life of a wry adult art critic.²⁵ In cases of this sort, ends may have no prospects to be evaluatively actualized. Hence, we may be justified in saying that they lost their potency to be valuable, and we call them whims if they are transient or compulsions if they are constant.²⁶

In this section, I left untouched a worry that looms large on coherentist accounts, organic holism included: Can't the most morally loathsome ends cohere? Isn't a coherent Caligula possible?²⁷ In the case of organic holism, the worry seems even worse. For even if we can show that coherent Caligula is *impossible*, organic holism seems to ascribe *potential value*, even to the most morally abhorrent ends, like a sadistic inclination to inflict pain on any living creature.

The first thing to note is that this worry belongs to the realm of objective value, while in this chapter our discussion is limited to subjective value. Once we have a fuller picture of subjective value, we will be better equipped to cope with the difficulties of objective value. This worry, therefore, will be addressed in the concluding chapter.²⁸ But until then, the worry can be somewhat assuaged in light of the previous sections. Since, if we take into account human natural inclinations and habituation, it

²⁵ The discussion in this section brings out the significance of ethical-imagination for caretakers but also in the potency of adults to actualize the value of yet-unintegrated desired ends. While I will not offer in the next chapters a systematic development of ethical imagination, I will return to it in the end of the next chapter, where I discuss adult value-actualization.

²⁶ A fitting organic analogy may be given by dead or severely stunted organs. Thus, a dried oak tree branch cannot anymore integrate with the species activities. It has lost even the potency to become a grown healthy organ. It is a branch in name only. I will have more to say about the case of new ends that emerge in adults' life in the next chapter.

²⁷ See Allan Gibbard, "Morality as Consistency in Living," *Ethics*, 110 (1999): 140–164; Cf. Street, "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?"

²⁸ In the fifth chapter, I will show how my view accounts for the difference between moral and immoral motive and, furthermore, I will argue that immoral ends are, in some sense, also less desirable from the subjective viewpoint. However, ultimately, my view cannot establish that immoral ends cannot possibly be, in some restricted sense, subjectively valuable.

becomes much harder, if not impossible, to imagine how certain abominable inclinations might integrate with basic human natural inclinations (like the need for warmth, love, and companionship) and with features of our form of life (like the need to work with others and respect them). Thus, the inclination to induce pain in living beings seems to undermine almost every other human activity and practice. Surely, this leaves open the possibility that for creatures of a wholly different nature and form of life, similarly loathsome inclinations can be organically integrated with other ends. But it is not clear that this poses a problem. That other, entirely foreign, life forms may have different systems of values, we do not share (and perhaps do not understand) does not strike me as counterintuitive or problematic in any other way. We see then, that according to organic holism, in the abstract, even the most loathsome inclinations are potentially valuable; but once we take into consideration the most rudimentary characteristics of the human condition, they are not even potentially valuable.²⁹

3.6 Non-Actualized Values as Privative Cases

The formal aspect of organic holism entails that what human beings value isn't fully determined. Human inclinations perhaps restrict the horizon of possibilities of valuable ends, but they do not determine what is actually valuable. In the previous sections, I argued that this is an advantage of my view since it supports the relative open-endedness of human life forms and leaves room for ethical imagination and creativeness. After all, human beings are unlike non-rational animals in that our inherent inclinations do not determine what is valuable for us to pursue.³⁰ If everything goes well, the instincts of non-rational animals constitute an organic whole—that is, they inherently further and

²⁹ One reason my account fares better with this worry than other coherentist accounts is due to the nature of organic justification. Weaker formal principles, like “consistency,” make it very hard to exclude the possibility of valuable abhorrent ends; as long as such desires do not contradict others, it follows that they are valuable. However, once we require that desired ends also be positively organically justified, the justification of abhorrent desires becomes hard, if not impossible.

³⁰ This distinction between rational and non-rational animals is prominent in the Kantian tradition. See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 50-51 (4:395-396); Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 106-108.

support each other; whereas for humans, the organic integration of the various inclinations is a rational process the outcome of which is not fully determined by our nature; rather it is determined through habituation and rational self-formation.³¹ Another way of stating this difference is that while nature “takes care” of the organic integration of animal’s instincts, for humans, organic integration is a task we accomplish through habituation and self-formation. Moreover, nothing promises us that the integration will be successful. Indeed, it may turn out that some inclinations simply cannot be integrated with each other.³²

This difference between rational and non-rational animals brings to the fore a possible difficulty for organic holism. For isn’t the fact that human inclinations, quite often, are in discord show that they do not have, by essence, an organic form? And if this is so, then human inchoate inclinations should not be understood as potentially valuable, as organic holism claims. In other words, the worry is that if human inclinations do not naturally integrate into an organic whole (as seems to be the case) then, unlike animal’s instincts, they cannot be conceived of as potentially valuable in their essence.

But is this really a problem? Can’t we conceive of a recalcitrant inclination that does not integrate with other desired ends is just a *privative* case? That is, can’t we understand a recalcitrant inclination as deficient, just like a stunted organ of an animal is? I will argue now that we can (and should) understand incalcitrant inclinations as deficient inclinations. But, first notice that once we conceive of inclinations that resist integration as deficient, we can retain the value-actualist claim that inchoate inclinations are potentially valuable. For, as the case of non-rational life shows, the claim that inclinations are potentially valuable and the claim that, at times, they do not develop to be actually

³¹ By rational self-formation, I refer to the many ways in which mature human beings strive to organize their inclinations. Thus, when we find in ourselves a new desire, we imagine how this desire can organically integrate with our organic whole of ends. I discuss such processes in the next chapters.

³² As I have just suggested, it is this impossibility that allows organic holism to establish a minimal conception of morality. I will elaborate on this notion in the fifth chapter.

valuable are *compatible* with each other. However, the suggestion that we should understand recalcitrant inclinations as deficient gives rise to two objections to which I will now turn.

First, the notion of privation requires a standard in relation to which something is deficient. In the case of non-rational life, the standard is given by a system of natural historical judgments that constitute a species, but such judgments seem to have no analogy in the human case. Consider the case of Dario the slow lion. Since Dario is slow, he cannot participate in hunting. This is surely a privative case, since hunting is an organic part of lions' life and hence, a good activity. The case of Dario can be generalized into the following formulation of the syllogism of natural privation:

1. A Natural historical judgment: A species (S) does A (e.g., lions hunt).
2. An individual case: s belongs to the species (S) but it doesn't A (e.g., Dario the lion does not hunt).
3. Conclusion: s is deficient (e.g., Dario is deficient).³³

I suggested that we should understand recalcitrant inclinations in the same manner. However, the analogy seems wrong. For, in Dario's case, the deficiency depends on a natural historical judgment, namely, that hunting is good for lions. The problem is that, by the light of organic holism,³⁴ no contentful natural judgments hold for human beings. And if human life does not consist of a system of natural historical judgments in comparison to which individuals can be defective, then the comparison to non-rational life is groundless. For there is no natural standard against which we can judge a recalcitrant inclination as deficient.

Defending organic holism against this objection, I will show that there are natural standards that apply to human beings. First, there is a formal version of the syllogism of natural privation that

³³ See Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life" in Michael Thompson *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Chapter 2.

³⁴ Or more generally, by the light of value-formalism.

applies rational animals and hence, to human beings. The formal standard that holds for rational animals is that their inclinations organically integrate with each other. Against this formal standard, we can conceive of inclinations as deficient. Thus, radioman's inclination to turn on radios in his vicinity is a deficient inclination, since it is not organically integrated with other ends he pursues.³⁵ We can formulate the formal version of the syllogism of natural privation in the following way:

1. A Formal Natural Historical Judgment: Rational animal's inclinations organically integrate with each other.
2. An Individual Case: *r* is a rational animal's inclination that is not organically integrated.
3. Conclusion: *r* is deficient.

Second, there is also a contentful version of natural privation for human beings. For as we have seen in previous sections, in the case of human beings, inclinations are organically integrated through a process of habituation into a way of life. Hence, the way of life into which we are habituated may function as the source of contentful standards, which can be seen as the human variant of natural historical judgments. Thus, in our culture, Harry's inclination to seek the company of his peers is nothing but the inclination toward friendship. Accordingly, if this inclination fails to develop into the pursuit and maintenance of good friendships, then we would rightly say that it is a deficient inclination.

We can now turn to the second objection: That it is in the nature (or essence) of inclinations to organically integrate entails that if nothing goes wrong, inclinations naturally organically integrate. Accordingly, just like the oak's shoots develop into branches, if nothing interferes, so will rational animal's inclinations develop naturally into organically integrated inclinations. But doesn't this imply that habituation is redundant? For after all, if it is by their nature that inclinations organically integrate,

³⁵ For the sake of my argument, I am assuming here that given the other aspects of radioman's life, this bizire also *cannot* integrate with his organically formed whole of desired ends.

they will integrate even without the assistance of cultivation and habituation (like oak shoots do not need to be nurtured through habituation).

This objection rests in the assumption that if inclinations *naturally* integrate with each other, it entails that they do so even without habituation. But why should we accept this assumption? For just like there are animals for whom certain environmental conditions are necessary for healthy development (such as protection and suckling), so are certain necessary conditions required for the integration of human inclinations.³⁶ Habituation into a way of life seems like such a necessary condition. If a human infant is left to her own devices (and somehow survives) it would be quite incredible if her inclinations are organically integrated. Indeed, it is exactly because human inclinations are unlike animal instincts that guidance and habituation is necessary in our case. Hence, it would be wrong to consider habituation as an “extra help” we may get in order to perfect the integration of our inclinations. Rather, for beings like us, habituation is an inseparable part of the nature of our inclinations. We may say, accordingly, that human inclinations, by their nature, integrate with each other *through habituation*. Now, I do not exclude here the *possibility* of another kind of rational animal for whom habituation is not necessary. But note that even if such a being is intelligible, it would not challenge the claim that for human beings, habituation is the essential way in which we actualize the value of our inclinations.

3.7 Conclusion

In the previous chapter, we have explored three lines of criticism against value-formalism. Of these lines of criticism, the third one (i.e., formalist dilemma) is the most fundamental since it concerns the

³⁶ I am not denying here the deep difference between the conditions required for non-rational animals' development and habituation. Though there is some evidence for teaching among some animals (in a loose sense), as far as I know, for no other species is habituation required for the sake of forming valuable ends.

very notion of value-formalism, namely, that a formal principle can render valuable desired ends. I argued that if the ends that constitute the base of construction are conceived as valuable, then the principle of construction is idle; and if they are conceived as non-valuable, then the principle of construction cannot render them valuable (i.e., an evaluative alchemy). In this chapter, I argued that we can overcome the formalist dilemma if we conceive of non-justified ends as potentially valuable and of justified ends as actually valuable. I then developed the account I named “organic holism” according to which potentially valuable ends are actualized by organic justification.

In concluding, note that through coping with the formalist dilemma, we have arrived at a view that is profoundly different from standard value-formalist accounts (like the ones we considered in the second chapter). One easily apparent difference is that in organic holism, merely desired ends are *potentially* valuable, while in standard value-formalism, merely desired ends are either valuable or non-valuable. But this is not the only (or the most profound) difference. The most significant difference is that in organic holism, the formal principle is not a principle by which we rationally decide what desired ends are valuable, but rather it is the principle of the *generation* (or development) of valuable ends. In organic holism, valuable ends are not a subset (or a revised set) of the agent’s set of desired ends (the base of construction). Rather, they are ends whose contents have been generated through organic integration with each other and, as a result, the contents are intrinsically justified; they are informed by organic justifications. By contrast, in standard value-formalist accounts, the principle of construction is a principle of choice or decision. We decide which of our desired ends is valuable by applying to them a formal principle (e.g., “consistence” or “systematicity”).

That “organic form” is a principle of generation rather than a principle of choosing among desired ends has significant implication for the role of ethical justification. Ethical justification is what constitutes valuable ends—that is, valuable ends are ends that are intrinsically ethically justified; such ends are generated through integration into an organic whole of ends. Accordingly, what is ethically

primary is not an act of rationally deciding or choosing what desired ends are valuable (as standard value-formalism has it) but rather, what is primary is that ends are intrinsically justified and, hence, valuable. The primacy means that rational decision or choice presupposes that we already have intrinsically justified ends; and we have such ends if they were successfully generated through a process of organic integration. Accordingly, unless something goes very wrong, mature agents already possess valuable ends and ethical decision is made relative to these valuable ends. Hence, we avoid the unintuitive notion that an end, like ‘sustaining a friendship’, is valuable if we rationally *choose* it by appeal to a formal principle. Rather, if things are not awfully wrong, ‘sustaining friendship’ is valuable for a mature agent since it is intrinsically organically justified. This, again, does not imply that organic holism denies that rational choice has an important place in ethical life. It only implies that in organic holism, choice and deliberation begin from intrinsically justified valuable ends and not from a formal principle. Thus, if we encounter desired ends new to us (e.g., mountain climbing), we do not begin our evaluation with a formal principle (e.g., “consistence”); rather we consult our already organically justified ends, and if the new end can be organically integrated with them, we evaluate it positively.

4

Organic Holism and Active Identification

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the formalist dilemma can be avoided if we conceive of non-justified desired ends as potentially valuable and of formal (organic) justification as their actualizing principle. Recall that the formalist dilemma was one of three difficulties value formalist accounts must overcome. In each of the next chapters, I shall address one of the two remaining difficulties.

1. The Distinction Difficulty: Ethical justification must, minimally, be able to distinguish between valuable and non-valuable ends. In section 2.2, we saw that formal principles fail to distinguish between merely desired ends and valuable ends. Whether such principles are absolutely empty (like “consistence”) or empty in a weaker sense (like “universalization”), they fail to meet the distinction requirement, since they are merely negative. Accordingly, we concluded that justifications must consist of a positive aspect, namely, they must speak in favor of contents (ends, maxims, or practices) rather than merely indicating that they are not in conflict with each other.
2. The Evaluative Difficulty: Since ethical justification is, by definition, a justification that renders ends valuable, it must be recognizable as evaluatively relevant. In section 2.3, we saw that formal principles are evaluative, since they establish agential unity, and unity supports identification with ends. However, a unity of passive contents is in itself passive rather than active. Accordingly, we concluded that to meet the evaluative requirement, rational principles must be such that they establish *active* unity, but this seems implausible given the nature of value-formalism.

In this chapter, I will address the second difficulty—the evaluative difficulty. I will argue in this chapter that organic justification, unlike other formal principles we have considered (“consistency,” “universality,” and “systematization”), meets the evaluative requirement, since it establishes agential unity in a manner that renders the agent’s ends rationally *active*.¹ As a first step, we should recall why principles are evaluative if they are unifying, and then see why unification alone is insufficient to render a formal principle evaluative.

Agential *unity* is a condition for the possibility of identification, since it constitutes the very distinction between what truly belongs to the agent and what she merely finds in her, or is merely “a force working in her or on her.”² Put in another way, if there is no unified agent but merely a multiplicity of desired ends, then there is no sense in which ends belong to the agent; indeed, it is unclear if there’s a sense in which there is an agent anymore. Accordingly, an agent is constituted by being unified, and if a principle is unifying, it is thereby constitutive of agency. Therefore, desires that are united by a unifying principle belong to the agent; they are her own; she identifies with them; they are not arbitrary forces “working in her or on her.” Therefore, formal principles that establish agential unity are evaluatively relevant since they are constitutive for identification.

Formal principles like “universalization,” “consistency,” and “systematization” establish agential unity, to some extent. However, we have seen in the second chapter that they fail to do so in the right way. Either because they are merely negative, like “consistency” and “universalization,” hence, they can establish unity only where the agent already identifies with some ends,³ or because, like “systematization,” they establish agential unity in a way that is passive rather than active. The first of these failures is a direct outcome of what I called the “emptiness difficulty,” which is the subject of

¹ Recall that “systematization” failed because, in a system, the most general ends are unifying but passive, since they are determined by the lower ends (which are, themselves, passive).

² Cf. Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 45.

³ Recall that this is a problem because it entails that such principles are not the primary ethical justification; they depend on another form of ethical justification by virtue of which some valuable ends are already given.

the next chapter. The second failure is the subject of this chapter. I will argue that organic holism establishes agential unity in a *fully active* manner and thus, overcomes the passivity entailed by principles like “systematization.” But first, we should clarify what passivity and activity mean in the context of establishing agential unity.

In the first chapter, we have seen that valuable ends are ends with which the agent *actively* identifies. Such ends are not merely ones that the agent finds within himself. Nor are they ends towards which the agent has a merely psychological feeling of identification. We have also seen that to actively identify with ends, the agent must see *justifications* for the ends with which he identifies. Hence, if ends are not justified, they are not the agent’s own; namely, the agent doesn’t identify with them *actively*. The problem with “systematization,” as we have seen in the second chapter, is that the highest or most general ends in a system of ends, are not themselves justified, and hence, they are passive rather than active. For that reason, the unity established by “systematization” isn’t fully active because the agent does not see justification for holding the ends that unify his system of ends. To establish a fully active unity, all valuable ends must be justified.⁴

Now, whereas “systematization” cannot meet this requirement, we have already seen in the previous chapter that organic form can. For ends in an organic whole are all justified and hence, the unity they constitute together is not passive. Hence, we have a good reason to believe that organic holism might succeed where the other formal principles failed. However, this hope is based in the very abstract discussion of the previous chapter; a discussion that did not directly touch on the notion of active identification. This chapter focuses on the question of active identification.

I begin this chapter by introducing a fundamental dilemma in accounting for rational active identification. The dilemma emerges from considerations we have discussed in some detail in the first

⁴ The argument against “systematization” is more intricate. However, some of the complications have to do with issues that are not directly relevant to this chapter, such as the notion of positive justification. For a development of these aspects of the argument, see 2.3 (especially 2.3.4).

chapter, and for that reason, I shall present them in brief. I will then argue that organic holism allows us to overcome the dilemma in a way that also explains how it establishes active unity and, thereby, allows us to overcome the evaluative difficulty.

4.2 Identification and Justifications

At the end of the first chapter, we have concluded that identification depends on having *justifications*. For the kind of beings we are, acting without knowing why we act in the way we do, is a case of alienation. Common to all the accounts considered in that chapter was that they did not connect identification with justifications. But, be the identity-making element as it may—second-order desires, feelings of identification, existential decision, or human essence—if the agent doesn't have justification for it, it isn't truly hers; hence, it is alienable and cannot account for identification.

We also saw in the first chapter that in noting the importance of justification, we should not forgo the insight that identification must be active rather than passive; instead, we should seek an account that unites both insights: Identification must reside in activity understood in terms of justifications. This view, namely, that for beings like us activity is bound up with rationality, is central to both the Aristotelian and the Kantian traditions and endorsed by many prominent contemporary philosophers.⁵ According to this view, desired ends with which one identifies must be justified ones and, in being justified, desired ends are not merely passively given psychological states the agent finds in herself, rather, they are active—she is active in holding them. Consider Charles' case again: Recall that Charles wishes to be a writer, and he is alienated from his materialistic desires, as long as he sees no justifications for having them; and he sees none, given his excellent financial situation. Now, say that Charles loses all his savings. In this case, he again sees a point in his material desires—he can

⁵ See, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, Joseph Raz "The Active and the Passive," Richard Moran "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life," and David Velleman "What Happens When Someone Acts."

justify them. Having them is no longer something he merely finds in himself—an alien, dead habit. Rather, he again holds them actively, through conceiving of justifications for having them. Identification, we see, has a rational dimension.

Contemporary accounts that respect this rational dimension come in two kinds. Rationalistic accounts hold that ends can be justified by acts of a special rational faculty; psychologistic accounts maintain that ends are justified by constituents of the agent's psychology. I will show now that the rationalistic kind involves a form of alienation I call "a split in the self," while psychologistic accounts cannot establish justifications in the relevant sense. I shall then argue that organic holism overcomes both difficulties.

According to rationalistic accounts, one's psychological makeup (e.g., one's desires), as such, is not truly one's own. In order to identify with her ends, the agent has to take a step back from her desires and consider them through the lens of her 'real' rational-self (e.g., by rationally judging or intuiting).⁶ These rationalistic accounts are plagued by a common predicament: The very rational act of identification constitutes a split in the self between the active-rational-inalienable part of the self and the merely passive-psychological-alienable part.⁷ This split-in-the-self renders the agent's own psychology alien. What is more, even if approved by the agent's rational self, her desires, considered in themselves, are not her own; rather, they just happen to conform to what her real, rational-self judges.⁸

⁶The rational part of the self can be either formal, that is, a faculty that consist in formal principles, as in constructivism (e.g., Korsgaard *Self-Constitution* and Sharon Street "Constitutivism about Reasons") or a faculty of rational intuitionism (e.g., G. E. Moore *Principia Ethica*, and David Ross, *The Right and the Good*).

⁷For a similar line of criticism, see Schroeder, Timothy, and Nomy Arpaly. "Alienation and externality." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (1999): 371-387; and Henry Richardson *Practical Reasoning about Final Ends* (Cambridge University Press, 1997): 138-142. It is worth noting that the 'split in the self' criticism doesn't apply only to rationalist accounts of identification. It applies, more generally, to accounts that consist in designating one part of the self as truly one's own and as that by virtue of which we identify. Thus, this criticism can equally be leveled against existentialist accounts in which identification consists in a pure capacity of decision. See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 710-713 and Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality." However, in the context of this chapter, only rationalistic accounts are relevant.

⁸The alienation from one psychology is manifest in many of Korsgaard's arguments. For example, she writes: "When you deliberate it is as if there were something over and above all your desires, something which is you, and which

But aren't our desires as such (i.e., even without reflecting on them), at least sometimes, sufficient grounds for our identification? Thus, doesn't my deep psychological concern for a dear friend make the end of tending her when she's ill my very own end, regardless of whether I've rationally reflected on the matter? Indeed, some of the ends with which we identify most deeply, like the well-being of our family and friends, are ends from which we rarely, if ever, take a reflective distance. Unless a conflict emerges, we are immersed in pursuing ends with which we deeply identify—ends that are profoundly *ours*. Moreover, often in the case of such core ends, it is a sign of a weaker identification if one sees them as one's own by virtue of taking a reflective distance from them.⁹ In general, we may say, distance from our ends typically marks a degree of alienation. The problem is, then, that such distance is constitutive of the rationalistic accounts of identification, as they posit a strong and principled opposition between the real rational-self and the alienable psychological self. Do accounts that respect the rational dimension of identification necessarily consist in such splitting in the self?

Psychologistic accounts, to which I now turn, do not commit us to a split in the self, but, as I'll show, they fail to account for justification in the relevant sense. On this kind of account, one justifies ends by appealing to one's psychological constituents, such as desires, emotions, commitments, projects, practical identities, or narratives.¹⁰ Thus, the desire to mow my friend's lawn may be justified by my care for my friend or by my desire to help her, or because I feel committed to

chooses which desire to act on." (*Sources of Normativity*, 100). It is clear that she considers the deliberative point of view as an agent's true self, as she writes in another place "it is only from the practical point of view that actions and choices can be distinguished from mere "behavior" determined by biological and psychological laws" (see, "personal Identity and the Unity of Agency," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 378.

⁹ Cf. Bernard Williams "Persons, Character and Morality" in Williams *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 17-19.

¹⁰ These justifying psychological entities may either already belong to the agent's psychology or be endorsed. See, for example, Bernard Williams discussion of desires and projects in "Internal and External Reasons" in *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches*. Ed. Darwall, Stephen L., Allan. Gibbard, and Peter Albert. Railton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an account that centers on narratives, see Marya Schechtman discussion of narratives in her *Staying alive: Personal identity, practical concerns, and the unity of a life* (OUP Oxford, 2014).

the notion that friends help each other, or because it is part of how I perceive myself that I'm the kind of person that helps his friends, etc. However, such accounts do not genuinely solve the challenge at hand. While it is true that I have reasons for mowing my friend's lawn, these reasons ultimately originate in brute psychological states and inclinations. But, then, the difficulty is simply pushed upstream to the springs of justifications. Since these springs are still *non-justified* psychological constituents, we encounter, again, the difficulty: How can non-justified passive entities be the source of active ends with which we identify?¹¹ Surely, the psychologistic response to this objection cannot be that such psychological entities are also justified because this would lead to infinite regress of justifications.

In search of a regress stopper, one may resort to a rationalistic account, namely, one may conclude that to stop the regress, we ought to step back from our psychology and justify our ends through our rational faculty. However, as we've seen, rationalistic accounts involve the unattractive splitting in the self. Are we then destined to oscillate between the Scylla of infinite regress and the Charybdis of a split self? A satisfying account of identification ought to respect the rational dimension of identification, without giving rise to a split in the self. But how can an end be justified without stepping back from it?

Overcoming the dilemma at hand requires two steps: First, we must have an account of justification that does not require one to step back from one's desires. To satisfy this demand I will argue for a holism of justification in which desired ends justify each other holistically (i.e., organic holism). Second, we ought to reject the psychologistic assumption, implicitly presupposed by *all* the accounts we have considered above, according to which psychological states and inclinations (e.g., desires), in themselves, are non-justified and, hence, passive. As long as we adhere to this assumption,

¹¹ This is a summary of the criticism I have leveled against psychologistic theories in the first chapter.

what we desire will always remain, in itself, unjustified and hence, in itself, passive and alien.¹² Such alienation, as we have just seen, cannot be amended by stepping back from our desires. In the organic holism I develop below, this psychologistic assumption is rejected: Organically justified desires are *intrinsically* justified.¹³

4.3 Organic Holism of Justifications

Justifications, on my account, do not consist in a separate rational part of the self. Rather, desired ends¹⁴ holistically justify each other. In a holistic framework, an agent's desired ends are justified if they either further, sustain, or instantiate other desired ends of hers.¹⁵ Thus, my desire to mow my friend's lawn is justified by my desire to help my friends, which, in turn, is justified by my desire to live a communal life; and so on and so forth. This holistic account resolves the dilemma at which we have arrived because, on the one hand, we do not prescribe a distinct part of the self, which is the real self (like the rational faculty), and on the other hand, the justifications do not spring from non-justified merely psychological passive states; rather, they spring from holistically justified desired ends. It is already here that we can see how organic holism solves the problem of passivity encountered by

¹² Korsgaard considers one's desires as "the passively confronted material upon which the active will operates, and not the agent or active will itself." See Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 241. Raymond Geuss points out that this view excludes the possibility of holism of justifications: "Since all of my desires are alien intruders, I can't use any of them to decide which of my other desires to endorse" (see Raymond Geuss, "Morality and Identity," 190).

¹³ It is helpful to distinguish my account from Henri Richardson's account of justified final ends. Richardson argues that final ends can be justified if they instantiate or mediate the higher commitments and values we have. My account differs in two important points: First, while Richardson's account concerns the possibility of deliberation about final ends, my account focuses on the possibility of intrinsically justified final ends. Indeed, as I have just noted, identification, in the fundamental sense, is not constituted by deliberation or rational reflection but rather by intrinsically justified desired ends. I will argue later that while deliberation is significant in restoring and enhancing identification, it is not constitutive of identification. Second, according to Richardson, final ends are justified by values and commitments, but the latter need not be justified in themselves. Hence, his account is neutral regarding whether justifying entities must be themselves justified, and therefore, it is not committed to the kind of holism I consider here. See, Henry Richardson, *Practical Reasoning About Final Ends*.

¹⁴ Holistic justification is not limited to desired ends. Other psychological constituents, like emotions, and narrative are also part of such holism. For the sake of brevity, I will limit the discussion to desired ends.

¹⁵ Here is the schema of each of the justificatory relations mentioned: (1) furthering: x justified by y, if by pursuing x the agent also assists in bringing about y. (2) sustaining: x is justified by y, if by pursuing x the agent assists in retaining y; (3) specifying: x is justified by y, if pursuing x is an instance of pursuing y (x is a less generic y).

“systematization.” For in a system of ends, lower ends are justified by higher ends which are, in turn, not justified. But, in an organic whole, all ends are justified.

Moreover, the kind of holism I propose (that is, organic holism) rejects the psychologistic assumption, according to which desires, in themselves, are non-rational and, hence, passive and alien. According to *organic* holism, ends do not merely justify each other but also determine each other’s content. By this I mean that desired ends that belong to organic holism are inseparable from their justifications—namely, these justifications constitute their content. Friendship, for instance, is not merely justified by other ends I desire. I don’t pursue an abstract notion of friendship that additionally happens to be justified by other ends I desire, like the well-being of my family and community. Rather, the kind of friendship I desire—its very content—is one that is justified holistically, meaning that it furthers and sustains other ends I desire. Accordingly, justifications are *intrinsic* to my understanding of what friendship is and to my pursuit of friendly engagements.

The fact that desired ends are thus *intrinsically* justified avoids the problem of the split self. I identify with such intrinsically justified ends, not because I step back from them and endorse them rationally (or otherwise) but rather, because they are infused with holistic justifications that tie them to other ends I desire. In other words, what renders such ends ‘mine’ is not that a part of me, which is the ‘real’ part (like my rational faculty), endorses them. Instead, their content is infused with justifications that rationally unify them with other ends I desire. Hence, they are not merely passive-psychologically-given ends, rather, they are both rational and psychologically immersive; they are intrinsically justified and pursued in a manner that reflects their unity with other desired ends. In the rest of this paper, I will substantiate my claim that an agent identifies with those of her desired ends that constitute an organic whole. But, first, it is necessary to address serious objections traditionally leveled against coherentist theories of justifications.

Any coherentist theory, organic holism included, ought to be considered in the light of two fundamental objections known in the literature as the *isolation* and *circularity* objections.¹⁶ The circularity of justification poses a serious challenge to my account and will be the concern of much of what comes next.¹⁷ But first, I wish to show briefly why the *isolation objection* does not cut ice with a holistic theory in the context of *identification*. According to this objection, the coherence of judgments (or other cognitive states) does not entail that they track reality (i.e., facts). In other words, a coherent set of descriptive or normative judgments can be incompatible with the way things truly are and, hence, their coherence with each other does not secure their truth. This objection is extremely difficult to overcome where the cohering judgments are supposed to track a reality that holds independently of them; namely, where they are made true or false by external states of affairs. However, in the context of identification, this worry seems out of place. Where holism is supposed to support identification (or subjective value), we are not concerned with how things are, in reality, *independent* of our identifications; rather, we are concerned with an agent's identifications with his ends and activities. In this context, it is gratuitous to require that the identifications should track anything independent of the agent, by virtue of which they hold.¹⁸ Seeing that the *isolation objection* is irrelevant to the matter at hand, we can turn to consider the charge of *vicious circularity*.

One may worry that if desired ends justify each other, then justifications are viciously circular; for ultimately, it implies that the source of justification is identical with that which is justified, and this

¹⁶ For a brief formulation of both objections, see: John Bender, "Coherence, Justification and Knowledge: The Current Debate" in *The Current State of the Coherence Theory: Critical Essays on the Epistemic Theories of Keith Lehrer and Laurence Bonjour, With Replies*. Ed. Bender, John (Vol. 44. Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 1-14.

¹⁷ In the previous chapter I have briefly addressed concern of circularity and tried to sooth it by appealing to the analogy between the furthering relations among organs, and the relations between ends in an organic whole. In this chapter I offer a more complete solution to the difficulty.

¹⁸ This does not mean that there are no possible accounts of identification that do consist in tracking reality independent of the agent (e.g., tracking agent independent values). Rather my point is that, unlike in epistemology, such theory cannot be presupposed against a coherentist account of identification. While judgments about the world are true or false by virtue of how the world is, it is at least not intuitive that identification concerns anything independent of the agent.

seems impossible.¹⁹ I have discussed the problem of vicious circularity, very briefly, in the previous chapter. There, my main purpose was to alleviate the worry of vicious circularity by drawing an analogy between functional circularity among organs in a living body and circularity of justifications within a system of desired ends. I argued that since the circularity in organic nature does not seem problematic, we should also not be automatically alarmed by the notion of circular justifications among ends. Moreover, in the previous chapter, I suggested that circularity is not vicious since, in my account, justifications don't bestow value on non-valuable ends, but rather, justifications actualize the potential value of desired ends.

While the comparison to organic nature and the conception of justification as actualizing may have established that circularity isn't *necessarily* vicious, they did not show that the circularity of organic justification is indeed benign. In other words, the discussion in the previous chapter has not dispelled the worry of vicious circularity. The idea that X can be justified by virtue of Y that is in turn justified by virtue of X, remains intuitively implausible. Indeed, it is very hard to overcome the sense that organic justification is viciously circular. For if I identify with an end (e.g., sustaining my friendships) by virtue of it being justified, then circular justification entails that, ultimately, after completing the circle of justifications, I identify with an end that is valuable by virtue of this end justifying itself. Thus, it would follow that I identify with the end of sustaining my friendships because it furthers and sustains itself, and this conclusion seems absurd.

The suspicion that circularity is vicious is exacerbated by the fact that organic justification consists in furthering and sustaining relations among ends, and this kind of justification seems naturally to be one that endows value on ends. For often we appeal to this kind of justification in instrumental reasoning. In such reasoning, we justify one end by appealing to another end, and it is

¹⁹ This idea is familiar from epistemology. It seems unlikely that a belief could be justified by appeal to a non-justified belief. Cf. Nicholas Rescher, *Cognitive Systemization: A Systems-theoretic Approach to a Coherentist Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979): 76.

usually the case that the justified end is valuable *only* by virtue of the justifying end. Thus, where I take the bus to visit my beloved sister, the bus ride is valuable *only* instrumentally, namely, only insofar as I conceive of it as means to realize the end of visiting my sister (which is valuable for me). Hence, if organic justification is nothing but a system of circular instrumental justifications, this would seem to lead to the verdict that circularity in organic justifications is vicious. For wouldn't the following, purely instrumental system of justification, be a clear-cut case of vicious circularity: I take a bus to the city, in order to take a bus back to my suburban abode, in order to take a bus to the city (and so on and so forth)?

In the rest of this section, I will prepare the grounds for my defense of organic justification against the circularity criticism, which will take place in the following section. The first, and most crucial, step is to understand what are the logical characteristics of justification that lead to vicious circularity. In other words, we should ask, what is it about justifications, such as instrumental justifications, that renders them void and futile when they are circular?

The circularity of justification is clearly vicious wherever justification constitutes, what I shall call, a "grounding relation" between the justifying and the justified entities. Note that what I mean by a 'grounding' relation is more determined than what contemporary philosophers denote by this term. In a grounding relation, in the sense I shall be using, one entity has a certain property G by virtue of being grounded in another entity that has this property G.²⁰ Thus, we may say that the value of the end of mowing a lawn is grounded in the value of sustaining the friendship with Saul, who owns the lawn. In this case, the value of mowing the lawn is justified by the value of the friendship with Saul; if

²⁰ In contemporary use, grounding usually denotes a relation between entities in which one entity has a property by virtue of another entity. Thus, we may say that X is F by virtue of Y. My use of the term is more determined, since it stipulates that if Y grounds X being an F, then it necessarily follows that Y is also an F. Thus, if Y grounds that X is justified, it would mean, in my use, that Y is also justified. But in the general use, it does not follow from X being justified that Y is. See Gideon Rosen, "Metaphysical dependence: Grounding and reduction." In *Modality: Metaphysics, logic, and epistemology*, ed. Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109-36. Schaffer, Jonathan. "On What Grounds What," In *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, Eds. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 347-83.

the latter were not valuable, the former wouldn't be valuable either. This sort of justification, I shall call *grounding* justification. Circularity among grounding justifications is vicious; it is tantamount to pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps; for ultimately, an entity that lacks a property, transmits the very property it is lacking. Thus, circular grounding justifications may lead to the absurd notion that mowing the lawn, which has in itself no-value, is ultimately the source of its own value.²¹

Hence, if justification in the context of identification is indeed grounding, then it follows that circular justification is vicious and, hence, that we must reject holism of justification. However, this is not the case in organic holism. As I will now argue, justifications in organic holism are *unifying*, and unifying justifications don't *ground*; namely, they do not transmit a property from the justifying desired end to the justified desired end, and hence, their circularity is not vicious.

4.4 Unifying Justifications

I argue in this section that unifying justifications do not ground and, hence, do not involve vicious circularity. I use the term *unifying justification* to denote the unifying aspect of justification. Generally, justifications unify as they establish rational links between justified and justifying entities. Thus, by justifying one desired end by another, we also show that they are rationally unified. For example, my pursuit of friendship is justified by the way it sustains my communal engagements and family life; it is by virtue of such justificatory links that friendships, community, and family are rationally unified. They are unified since they justify each other.

This unifying aspect of justifications (that is, unifying justifications) is involved in identification. Consider the following example. Charles identifies with his literary desire. On my account, this means that his literary desire is intrinsically justified by other ends he desires. These

²¹ For a more rigorous formulation of "grounding relations" and the way they lead to vicious circularity of justifications, see the appendix of this chapter.

justifications constitute a rational unity between Charles' desired ends. Now, if we ask him why he identifies with his literary desire, he will appeal to these justifications. In doing so, his point is not to ground his identification with this desire in other desires he has, but to articulate how it is unified with other ends he desires; namely, he specifies other desired ends that are furthered by pursuing his literary desire. Thus, he maintains, writing furthers his friendships, as it enriches and deepens his understanding of his friends and provides him with ample issues for great conversations. Accordingly, Charles can say that his friendships give him reasons to pursue writing; they *justify* his desire to write. By thus justifying writing, Charles does not aim at *grounding* his identification with his literary desire in other ends. He does not mean to imply that other ends are 'identity-makers' (namely, that other ends bestow on his literary end the property of 'identification' it otherwise lacks). His identification with the end of writing is neither less than his identification with the justifying desired ends nor derivative of them. Rather, by justifying in this manner, his *aim* is to articulate the manner in which writing, for him, is integrated with other desired ends. In this case, rather than grounding, justifications articulate the *unity* of Charles' practical self. They articulate the ties between Charles' desired ends by virtue of which they constitute a systematic unity, rather than a mere heap, and show that the justified ends belong to this unity. This kind of justifications I call *unifying justifications*, and the whole of desires they constitute I call an *organic whole*.

It is helpful to compare unifying justification to instrumental justification. Charles goes downtown once a week for a reading group dedicated to literary criticism. To get there, he needs to take the bus. Participating in this reading group is something he identifies with; it is deeply his own activity and expresses what he values in life. Taking the bus isn't. The only thing that renders the bus ride "his own activity" is that it is instrumental for attending the reading group. When Charles says that he's taking the bus for the sake of attending the reading group, what he means is that the reading group is what makes the ride "his own" activity; it is (subjectively) valuable because it is conducive to

what he identifies with. Now, though his justification for attending the reading group may appear similar to the instrumental justification of his bus ride, as it also consists of mentioning activities that are furthered and supported by the activity, it is merely a surface similarity that obscures a deep difference. The point in justifying his participation in a reading group is not to explicate its link to what renders it “his own”; the point is rather to disclose its place in his life²² and its interconnectedness with other activities that are his own.²³

I will later show that we *identify* with desired ends that are justified by unifying justifications. But the task in this section is to argue that a whole of unifying justifications (that is, an organic whole) is not susceptible to the *circularity objection*. The *circularity objection* applies, recall, to cases in which justifications are supposed to transmit a property (e.g., identification or unity) to ends, by linking them to other ends, that is, by grounding them. However, as we have just seen, unifying justifications do not function in that manner; *they do not ground*. They do not transmit ‘unity’ from one desired end to another; rather, they articulate the way in which these desired ends, together, constitute an organic whole. In this context, it matters not if desired ends justify each other in a circular manner—it does not reduce the unity of the set if justifications are circular. Again, when asked, why do I identify with an end I desire, or alternatively, why do I (subjectively) value this end, I answer by pointing to the way it is united with or woven into other desired ends of mine. And I do so by articulating the way these ends are supporting and furthering each other. We conclude, therefore, that unifying justifications are

²² What I mean by “the place it has in life” will become clearer later, when I elaborate on the active nature of organically justified activities.

²³ It may seem that there’s a simpler way to explain the difference between the two cases; for while Charles desires participating in the reading group, he does not desire taking the bus (i.e., had it not been for the sake of something he desires, he would have no interest riding the bus). So, why wouldn’t it be just sufficient to say that what’s truly one’s own is what is both justified and desired? In the previous chapter, we have seen that separating desires and justification leads to the formalist dilemma, and hence, it should be avoided.

not susceptible to the circularity objection and, hence, neither is a whole they constitute (i.e., an organic whole).²⁴

4.5 Organic Holism and Identification

Having removed the charge of vicious circularity, I can now return to defend the main claim I made, namely, that organic holism establishes active rational identification in a way that overcomes the dilemma between infinite regress of justifications and splitting self. That it overcomes the horn of the infinite regress of justification has already been shown. Justifications in organic holism are benignly circular. Therefore, it is to the second horn of the dilemma that I now turn. My defense of the claim that organic holism establishes active rational identification in a way that does not lead to a split in the self will take a positive and a negative route. Negatively, I will show that organic holism does not lead to a split in the self. Positively, I will argue that it also succeeds in establishing active rational identification and meets the evaluative requirement.

I begin by a very brief statement of the negative part of the argument. Organic holism avoids the split-self horn of the dilemma because it does not postulate a rational “true self” that reflects from the outside on one’s merely psychological desired ends. There is no privileged part of the self (i.e., the real self) which is the source of the justification. Rather, one’s desired ends are the source of justification of one’s desired ends. This is clearly a very brief formulation of the negative part of my argument. I will have more to say about it after I develop the positive part of my defense, to which I now turn.

²⁴ It is helpful to recall that circular supportive relations do not raise any difficulty in organic nature, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Seeing circularity in unifying justifications as vicious is akin to the claim that the mutually supportive vital activities of an organism somehow lessen the unity of its life form because they are circular. Consider the following circular nexus: the trunk sustains the branches and the leaves, but the latter support the branches by providing them with energy. These various life activities are linked circularly and if they were, in themselves, to ground any property, they would fail to do so. However, if we see them as articulating the unity of activities that makes a form of life, then there seems to be no reason to reject them.

The positive challenge, as I have just noted, is to show that an agent actively and rationally identifies with ends that belong to her organically formed whole of ends. For even if all her desired ends are justified, they may be justified in the wrong way. That ends can be justified in the wrong way, I have argued in detail in the second chapter. We saw that a justification may be such that it cannot distinguish between ends with which the agent identifies and ends with which she doesn't (failing the distinction requirement). We also saw that ends can be justified in a way that is evaluatively *irrelevant*, namely, in a way that doesn't render them the agent's own (failing the evaluative requirement). The first difficulty is the subject of the next chapter. In this section, I take up the latter difficulty, namely, to show that organic justification is evaluatively relevant.

What makes a justification evaluatively relevant is that it renders justified ends *actively* the agent's own. After all, as I mentioned in section 4.2, we have turned to justification to account for the notion of active identification. For rational creatures like us, to actively identify with an end requires that we see justifications for holding (or pursuing) this end, but that we see a justification for an end is insufficient. For not all kinds of justifications establish active identification. In this section, I argue that unifying justifications (of which organic holism consists) meet the evaluative requirement. I will first show that it is relevant for identification since it establishes agential unity, and then I will argue that organic justifications establish identification in a way that is active.

4.5.1 Unifying ends

The first step is to recall how agential unity supports identification. The idea is, crudely, that without agential unity, we cannot distinguish between desires that are ours (i.e., desires with which we identify) and those that are not (from which we are alienated). The conceptual link between agential unity and identification comes into view, if we notice that when I identify with a desire, it is thereby *mine*—a part of myself—it belongs to me. Relations such as “belonging to” and “being part of” imply the existence

of a unity (or a whole) to which something belongs. If there is no such unity, it is unclear what “belonging to” or “being part of” could mean. Identifying with a desired end means that it belongs to an agential unity; it is internal to the agent. Alienation, on the other hand, implies that the desired end is external to the unity. In the absence of unity, however, these concepts are obscure. If the agent possesses no unity, it is not clear what it could mean that a desired end belongs to him. It is by having a unity that we can distinguish between desires that are internal and those that are external to the agent. It is, moreover, plausible that the more deeply desires belong to one’s unity, the more they are inalienable.²⁵

We can view a unity constituted by unifying justifications (i.e., an organic whole) as instantiating the general conceptual link between unity and identification I have just laid out: desires that belong to an organic whole, those justified by unifying justifications, thereby belong to the agent; they are her own. Other desires are external to her; alien to her. The more robust and inclusive the unity (i.e., the more the agent’s set of desires constitutes an organic whole), the more those desires belong to her in an inalienable way. Hence, we see that organic justification is evaluatively relevant since it unifies the agent.

4.5.2 Active Identification

Now, as I have noted above, in the second chapter, we have seen that other formal principles are also evaluatively relevant because they facilitate agential unity. But we concluded that they still fail to meet the evaluative requirement, since they do not render the agent’s ends *active*. Hence, if organic

²⁵ In the Kantian tradition, the conceptual link between unity and activity (or spontaneity) receives special attention. Among neo-Kantians, Christine Korsgaard’s made rational unity into the centerpiece of her view of rational agency. My account differs from hers in a crucial way: For Korsgaard, the unity consists in pure rational judgment, which has no primary role in my account. Organic unity does not rest in any judgment the agent makes by stepping back from her occurrent desires, rather, it consists in sustaining and furthering relations among the agent’s ends. Rather than being established by stepping back and judging one’s ends, organic unity is present in the very pursuit of ends, since the ends are guided and formed through its rational relations with other ends. See Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*.

justification is to fare any better, we must show that it *does* render ends active. For that sake, let us compare “systematization” with organic form. The problem with “systematization” was that the highest, most general ends in a system, that is, the ends that justify lower ends, are not themselves justified by any other ends. In the second chapter, I have considered the suggestion that higher ends are justified by lower ends. However, I rejected this suggestion by arguing that since the lower ends are justified by the higher ends, they cannot also justify the higher ends. Hence, either the lower ends are justified by the higher ends, and then the higher ends are non-justified and passive, or the higher ends are justified by the lower ends, but then they are justified by non-justified ends and, hence, they are, again, passive. In either case, we end up with the same result: the highest ends in a system, though they *unify* the system, are not themselves justified and therefore the agent does not *actively* identify with these ends.

On the face of it, organic holism is not susceptible to the problem of passivity, since all ends in an organic whole are justified, and therefore, they are active rather than passive. However, consider the following argument to the effect that even when all ends are justified, they may still be passive in another sense: A set of merely psychological desired ends can *happen* to stand in mutual supporting and furthering relationship, so that together they constitute an organic whole. But, in this case, why should we think that the desired ends are active? Doesn't each of these desires remain a merely psychological state the agent finds within himself? After all, even a whim may accidentally further and support other desired ends, and surely, a whim is not actively the agent's own. Hence, one may object that even though in an organic whole all desired ends stand in supportive and sustaining mutual relations, yet, they are not active.

To adequately respond to this objection, we should further elucidate the link between justification and activity. What exactly does it mean that an end is active *because* it is justified? What does it mean to pursue *rationally active* desired ends? To answer these questions and thereby elucidate

the link between activity and rationality, I now turn to consider (very briefly) three contemporary accounts of this link.

1. Value-Based Account: Desired ends are actively one's own when they are justified by appealing to valuable ends. Thus, Charles' desire to do research for his next book is justified, since it instantiates (and furthers) the end of writing novels, which he values. On this kind of account, a justified end is actively one's own because it is tied to a valuable end, and valuable ends are not just passively desired ends, but truly one's own.²⁶ Clearly, this kind of account is not an option we can consider in the context of this dissertation, since it presupposes a conception of valuable ends. And such a conception is not something we can assume here; indeed, a conception of valuable ends is the goal of the dissertation as a whole.

2. Deliberative Account: Ends are actively one's own when they follow from a process of deliberation (i.e., of making up one's mind). Accordingly, the end of participating in a reading group is Charles's own, if he endorsed it as a result of a deliberation. This account assumes that such an end is not passive; it is not an end he just happens to find in himself because it is the product of his own conscious activity, namely, deliberation.²⁷ One problem with the deliberative account, is that it implies a split in the self, since it stipulates a 'true-active' part of the self, by virtue of which the agent identifies with desired ends. Notwithstanding the split-self difficulty, this account is also unsatisfactory since it entails that desired ends are active, by virtue of a process (i.e., deliberation) that took place in the past. Accordingly, what is *rationally active* is *not* the actually desired end, but rather, the process from which it originates. This is unsatisfactory since the point of appealing to justification, in the first place, was

²⁶ See Watson, "Free Will" and Moran, "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life."

²⁷ See, Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 125 and *The Sources of Normativity*, 227-229. For a similar view in relation to beliefs Richard "Responses to O'Brien and Shoemaker." *European Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2003): 402-419..

that ends are one's own when one sees justification for holding these ends; but the deliberative account only tells us that at some point in the past, the agent saw justification for the end she now desires.²⁸

The manner in which the deliberative account is unsatisfactory throws into relief an important aspect of rational activity. In being rationally active, the agent desires *rationally*—i.e., justification is constitutive to her desiring an end. Accordingly, desiring rationally is a way of desiring rather than a matter of causal history (i.e., of what brought about the desire). By this light, the desire is passive, even if it originates from a cogent rational process. How should we understand rationally active desires in this sense? The next account makes a significant step in answering this question:

3. Reasons-Sensitivity Account: Desired ends are actively one's own when they are sensitive (or malleable) to reasons. Thus, Charles' desire to write novels is rationally active because it is sensitive to reasons. If, for example, the changing times demand that he joins the struggle for social justice, what he desires to write about changes accordingly to subjects relevant and conducive to social justice.²⁹ This account improves on the deliberative account, since here, what marks a rationally active desired end is something about the desired end, rather than its etiology. However, it is not without problems. The main problem is that on this account the rationality is manifested only where there is a modification in one's reasons, such as Charles' awakening social consciousness. In between such modifications, there is nothing rational about such desires. In the course of these intervals, passively desired ends and rationally-actively desired ends are indistinguishable.³⁰ One may suggest that while in

²⁸ In a number of papers Matthew Boyle launches a similar criticism in relation to beliefs. He attacks views that suggests that actively holding beliefs can be understood in terms of the history of their acquisition. Beliefs, on his account, are not "stored" but rather, they are actively and rationally held by the agent. See Matthew Boyle, "'Making up your mind' and the Activity of Reason," *Philosophers' Imprint* 11(17): 1-24.

²⁹ Scanlon *What We Owe to Each Other*. A similar view is suggested in Moran "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life."

³⁰ Another problem is specific to the task at hand. For the reasons-sensitivity account presupposes that reasons are themselves active. But we cannot assume that. Thus, assume that Charles becomes a compulsive gambler. His new compulsion gives him reasons to maximize in income to enable his gambling habits and since his desire to writing is sensitive to reasons, he now desires to write promotional literature. In this case, reasons-sensitivity renders a slave to his gambling habits, and hence less his own and less active.

such intervals active and passive desired ends are indistinguishable in the way the agent pursues them, they are distinguishable if we expand our view to include the past; for while active desires have been malleable to reasons at some point in the past, passive ones have not. However, we have already rejected this kind of history-dependent conception when we considered the deliberative account.

The lesson to take from this short review of contemporary accounts of rational activity is that a satisfying account must be one on which the rationality is present *in desiring*—i.e., in the way desired ends are pursued. And, as I will now show, this is exactly what intrinsic rationality (as it is understood in organic holism) establishes.

4.6 The Intrinsic Rationality of Desired Ends and Activity

In pursuing an organically justified end, the agent is active in the sense that he sees the considerations for pursuing it in the way he does. This notion of activity ought to be contrasted with the passivity associated with pursuing ends blindly; namely, without conceiving of the reasons for which they are pursued in the way they are pursued, as in the case of compulsions or whims. Thus, for example, in having a whimsical desire to turn on radios in his vicinity, the agent sees no justifications for turning on radios; he is blindly moved to do so. Moreover, since he conceives of no justifications for doing so, he also has no insight into the specificities of his end; thus, he knows not what constitutes the right quantity of turned-on radios or whether turning on a radio app on his smartphone counts or not. The answers to these questions are determined by his compulsive desire (if at all)—he is *passive* in relation to the way they are determined.

By contrast, consider Charles' literary desire. His desire to write is *infused* with justifications. Not only does he see how it furthers and sustains other ends he desires, but also, the justifications guide him to the right way of pursuing his literary ends. Thus, since writing is partly justified by the well-being of his family, there are types of literary activities and subjects that are especially fitting and

others that are rendered either excessive or deficient. For example, his desire to cultivate and enrich the life of his children, informs and modifies the kind of novels he desires to write. His desire to write constantly responds to alterations in the life of his children, wife, friends, and his community in general. It is not a rigidly-given motivating entity, in relation to which he is a passive subject. Rather, he pursues his writing actively, as it is an end that is flexible and responsive to his desires as a whole.

This account of rational activity does not suffer from the deficiencies of the other contemporary accounts I have presented above. Where justifications are intrinsic to the desired ends, the very pursuit of the end is rationally active, rather than being active by virtue of past processes (e.g., deliberation) or preexisting values. Moreover, I also believe this account provides a notion of activity that is very intuitive. We are active when we pursue our actions through self-guidance—when we know why we do what we do, in the way we do. And we are passive when this rational-self guiding is compromised, as in the extreme case of whimsical and compulsive behaviors.³¹

4.7 Conclusion

The primary challenge of this chapter was to show that organic holism meets the evaluative requirement. I pursued this challenge through another challenge (i.e., overcoming a dilemma in accounting for the rationality of identification between the Scylla of infinite regress and the Charybdis of a split self). We required that a satisfying theory of identification should account for the rational dimension of identification, without splitting the self between the real rational self (i.e., one's rational faculty) and the alienable psychological self. Organic holism satisfies this requirement since it does not set up a principled opposition between our psychology and our rational faculty. In pursuing ends that

³¹ Note that intrinsic justification is part and parcel of my account. It has been developed in the previous chapter where I showed that to overcome the formalist dilemma we must understand organic justification as intrinsic to the desired ends. In the process of a successful habituation, the agent's desired ends do not only justify each other, but determine each other, so that the content of each, consists of organic justifications.

belong to her organic unity of desires, the agent need not *step back* from her actual desires and exercise a special faculty (e.g., pure rationality or decision) to identify with them. Rather, she identifies with her desired ends *in pursuing them*, since they are infused with justifications given through the whole of her desired ends. Hence, as promised, organic holism accounts for the rational dimension of identification without giving rise to a split in the self.

We also saw that organic holism meets the challenge of the evaluative requirement. It is evaluatively relevant since it establishes agential unity in a manner that is fully rationally active. We saw that unifying justifications do not only allow us to avoid vicious circularity, but they are also especially fitting for establishing active rational active identification, since they account for two essential aspects of identification: Qua justifications, they render desired ends infused with reasons and active; and qua unifying, they constitute the agential unity to which these ends belong. In pursuing such ends, the agent as a whole is active.

In concluding, I wish to address a couple of objections. First, one may worry that organic holism poses an overly demanding requirement on identification; do I really mean to claim that agents whose desires don't constitute an organic whole, cannot identify? My answer is that organic unity comes in gradations that corresponds to one's level of identification with one's desired ends. Some agents are more unified than others, and some desired ends are more justified than others. Organic unity runs the gamut from a set of desires unified by a robust nexus of unifying justifications, to desires not justified at all. Most of us, I believe, find ourselves in the intermediate realm between full organic unity and a complete lack thereof. It means that while we have a core of desired ends that mutually justify each other and constitute our agential unity (like Charles' literary desire) with which we strongly identify, we also have peripheral desires, tenuously justified, with which our identification is ambivalent or precarious. At times, we also have desires entirely unjustified and severed from our

agential core. The latter, in my account, are the ones we take as alien and perhaps whimsical or compulsive.

Second, my account might also seem to exist in tension with cases of new but significant psychological involvements, such as a new love affair or a major work project. Such new involvements may seem to raise difficulties for my account, since one may identify with them though it is hardly the normal case that, upon their emergence, they already belong to one's organic whole of desired ends. How is the possibility of such cases compatible with my organic account? A full answer would carry us well beyond the confines of this chapter, but I can offer an initial response here: Our identification with new significant involvements bears a special relation to the future and consists of imaginative activity and rational reflection. The agent identifies with them in the hope that they will eventually become an organic part of her life. Take Ruthie, who has just enthusiastically accepted an executive position in a hi-tech company. We may say that she identifies with her new demanding tasks and objectives, but this identification, I contend, is *prospective*: It involves the hope that this job will integrate with her other organically formed ends (e.g., the well-being of her family and friends). Such future integration usually requires imaginative and rational reflection: Ruthie imagines ways in which her new job would further and be furthered by her other involvements. She also reflects rationally on her whole set of ends, in search of the best manner in which they can be integrated. A failure to even imagine an organic future, may lead her to doubt whether this position can truly be hers, rather than an alienated part of her life.

This prospective aspect of new significant involvements should become apparent if we consider the case in which, over the course of time, rather than being integrated, they remain isolated from the agent's other involvements. In such cases, rather than being objects of deep identification, the agent experiences poignant alienation from them. Thus, imagine the unfortunate case in which Ruthie's integration efforts fail: Rather than being an organic part of her life, her hi-tech job becomes

a foreign obligation; a constant reminder of the nascent promise it carried and the eventual disappointment. Such frustrated promises are the matter of deep alienation.

Earlier, we rejected the rationalistic view that identification consists in rational reflection. Now, we can see the proper role of rational reflection in an account of identification. Reflective activity is vital in two main cases: First, as we have just noted, when a new involvement emerges, we can reflect rationally on the way it can be integrated with other ends we desire. Second, when a conflict emerges among our organic whole of ends, we may step back and seek a solution through rational reflection. Hence, while rational reflection, on its own, does not account satisfyingly for identification, it is of great importance for *maintaining* identification.

We may compare rational reflection to the capacities of growth and healing in organisms: While these capacities are essential in achieving and maintaining the organism's flourishing, they do not define what flourishing is. To understand what flourishing is, we need to understand the organic system of the organism's (and its species') vital activities. Similarly, rational reflection, while crucial to identification in the manner explained above, is not part of understanding what identification essentially is (i.e., it is not a primary ethical justification). To understand the role of rational reflection, we first need to conceive of identification as residing in the organic whole of the agent's desired ends.

4.8 Appendix – Formal Definition of Grounding Justification

To assess whether this objection is indeed fatal in the context of identification, it is instructive to first consider its strength in the abstract:

1. Let E stand for an entity type, $(e, e', e'' \dots e^n)$ for its tokens, and G for a property that tokens of E can have.
2. Suppose that G is a property transmitted through justifications. Specifically, each token of E $(e, e', e'' \dots e^n)$ has the property G, *only* by being rationally linked to (i.e., justified by) another token of E that *has* G. Where G is transmitted to e through e', we say that e' is the G-maker of e (or alternatively, the fact that e has G is *grounded* in the fact that e' has G).
3. Suppose that any token of E, considered in itself, does not have G.
4. If tokens of the type E are circularly justified, it means that e is ultimately its own G-maker. This is absurd since, as stipulated above, e doesn't have G in itself (see 3) but, rather, only where G is transmitted via justification (see 2), and therefore, e cannot justify its having G; e cannot be its own G-maker.

Through this formal argument, we see that circular justifications are vicious in any case that conforms to the characteristics formulated in (1-3). Circularity is vicious wherever justifications function as endowing an entity (e) with a property it does not otherwise have (G), by relating it to another entity (e') that possesses this property (the G-maker). Wherein justifications function in this manner, I shall call them *grounding*. A grounding justification functions by transmitting a property to one entity, by linking it to another entity that possesses this property (property-maker). The formal argument above demonstrates that given a few assumptions concerning the properties and the entities involved, circularity in grounding justifications is vicious.

5

Organic Holism and Morality

Of the three challenges raised in the second chapter, I have already answered two. In the third chapter, I argued that organic holism overcomes the formalist dilemma, and in the fourth chapter, I showed that it meets the evaluative requirement. The remaining challenge is to show that organic holism meets the distinction requirement; and this is the task of this chapter. I will argue that, unlike “consistence” and “universalization,” organic holism distinguishes between valuable and non-valuable ends in the *right way*. Meeting the distinction requirement demands also that organic holism distinguish, in the right way, between moral and immoral (or non-moral) ends. Hence, in this chapter I also develop the moral aspects of my view. I will conclude the chapter by situating organic holism among contemporary approaches to normative ethics and metaethics.

5.1 The Distinction Requirement

In the first section of the second chapter, I considered how two prominent principles of construction (i.e., “consistence” and “universalization”) fare with the emptiness criticism; namely, with the claim that formal principles fail the *distinction requirement*. We have seen that “consistence” is absolutely empty since it fails to draw any distinction between ends (or maxims) and that “universalization” fails to draw the right kind of distinction. In each case, we’ve seen that without presupposing the value of certain contents (ends, maxims or practices), the principle of construction cannot distinguish properly between ends or maxims. We concluded that the failures of these principles to meet the distinction requirement stem from the same root: They both provide merely negative rather than positive

justification. An end is negatively justified, in case it does *not* clash with other members of a set¹. By contrast, *positive justification* speaks *in favor* of members (e.g., ends) rather than merely indicating that they don't interfere with each other.

But what would it mean for a *formal* principle to provide positive justification? In other words, how can a principle that consists of no contents speak *in favor* of ends? What we have seen in previous chapters is that formal principles do not positively justify ends directly. However, some principles, like “systematization” and “organic form,” specify *forms* or *schemas* of justifications among ends. Thus, where ends are systematized, higher, more general ends positively justify lower ends. As we saw in chapter 2, It is because his desired ends are systematized that Noah can speak in favor of his lower familial ends, like visiting his aunt or tutoring his niece; these ends are valuable because they instantiate his general end of sustaining and invigorating his family life. “Systematization,” accordingly, can be seen as a schema for positive justification among ends. In a similar manner, we saw in the previous chapter that organic holism supports positive justification: An agent whose ends are organically formed, can justify positively each of his ends by appealing to other organically formed ends.

We see, then, that “organic form,” unlike “consistence” and “universalization,” supports positive justifications, rather than merely negative ones. According to the conclusions of the second chapter, this should put organic holism in a position to meet the *distinction requirement*, namely, the requirement that formal principles distinguish, in the right way, between valuable and non-valuable ends.

Let us now consider whether indeed it meets the distinction requirement: First, it is clear that organic holism does not fail the requirement absolutely,² since it can mark a difference between organically

¹ In other words, on such principles, if we ask why an end (e.g., trust among humans) is valuable, the answer is in negative terms; it has the following form: “Because it does *not* interfere with other members in the set.”

² To absolutely fail the distinction requirement means, recall, that a principle fails to mark *any* distinction between valuable and non-valuable sets of ends.

justified ends (and set of ends) and ends that are not organically justified. Moreover, unlike “consistence,” organic justification can distinguish between more and less justified ends. While consistence is not a property a set can have, more or less (for all consistent sets are equally consistent), sets can be more or less robustly organic; similarly, ends can vary in the extent to which they are organically justified. Desired ends that support and are supported by a great number of other desired ends are more robustly justified than ends that are only marginal in an organic system of ends. Invoking the terminology employed in the second chapter, we may say, then, that organic holism is not *absolutely* empty.

However, is it perhaps empty, in a weaker sense, like “universalization”? Recall that although “universalization” can distinguish between sets of ends, it can do so only by *presupposing* valuable ends. As I have noted before, we have traced this “weak emptiness” to the fact that “universalization” is merely a negative principle. Accordingly, we should expect organic holism to fare better since, as we have just seen, it supports positive justification. And, indeed, it clearly does fare better, as I’ll now argue.

The one case where positive justification is most strikingly required is in distinguishing between valuable ends and meaningless ends, like the objects of whims (or “bizires”). In the second chapter, I showed that merely negative principles fail to distinguish between meaningless ends and valuable ends. They fail because what characterizes whimsical ends, most generally, is that they are not justified *positively*; namely, that nothing speaks in their favor. Hence, such ends might be justified negatively,³ but once a principle supports positive justifications (like “systematization” or “organic form”), whims are perhaps the most unlikely ends to be justified. Thus, according to organic holism, what positively justifies ends is that they further or sustain other ends and the whole of organically

³ And I argued that they are indeed typically justified; because, typically, whims are inconsequential, and due to that fact, they are likely not to interfere with other ends; which renders them negatively justified.

formed set of ends. A whim, characteristically, does not have a place in furthering and sustaining relations between ends.⁴ Hence, “organic form” does not give rise to the absurdity to which merely negative principles lead, as it distinguishes between meaningless whimsical and valuable ones; that is, ones that are truly the agent’s own.

That positive principles can distinguish between whimsical and valuable ends is only to be expected. However, in our discussion of the distinction requirement, we have also considered another difficulty to meet the distinction requirement; a difficulty that may seem to seriously challenge “organic form.” We have seen that, unless we presuppose that some ends are already valuable, formal principles (such as “universalization”) can vindicate ends and maxims we normally consider malicious (e.g., eliminate trust among human beings) and prohibit what we take to be morally commendable maxims and ends (e.g., succor the poor). This failure to distinguish, in the right way, between valuable and non-valuable ends, is most striking in the *moral* realm (narrowly understood); that is, in the realm of our duties to each other. We saw that even a principle like “universalization,” which seems almost to be designed to delineating the moral realm, ultimately fails to distinguish correctly between moral and immoral maxims, unless some valuable ends (or maxims or practices) are presupposed. Now, if a principle like “universalization” fails at establishing moral principles (without presupposing some valuable ends), it would seem hardly plausible that organic form can succeed in doing so. Indeed, given that “organic form” is a coherentist principle, it is subject to a worry that looms large on all coherentist accounts of ethical justification: Can’t the most morally loathsome ends cohere? Isn’t a coherent Caligula possible?⁵

⁴ While it isn’t characteristic of whims to further and support other desired ends, they may *accidentally* do so. In the case they do support other ends, are they, therefore, valuable? I have rejected this scenario in 4.5.

⁵ The example of “coherent Caligula,” now a common trope in metaethics, goes back to Gibbard Allan Gibbard, “Morality as Consistency in Living” He writes: Caligula, imagine, aims solely to maximize the suffering of others. That is a horrendous life policy, but it needn’t be formally inconsistent. We decent people might recognize such a policy as consistent, but still disagree with it; we are coherent to do so. (ibid. p. 145).

Answering this question in the negative is tantamount to holding that formal principles can yield a priori judgments, such as the categorical proscription on inflicting suffering on others (for no ulterior motive). It is, therefore, unsurprising that, in debating this question, value-formalists who hold that coherent Caligula is impossible, usually belong to the neo-Kantian camp, while those who believe it is possible, belong to the neo-Humean camp.⁶ The first hold that the formal principles that are constitutive for agency are also constitutive for morality;⁷ the latter maintain that the formal principles that are constitutive of agency do not support any moral commitments.⁸

The position I shall now advance, walks a middle path between these camps. On the one hand, considered in the most abstract and purely formally, organic form does not yield any contentful directives (and hence, also no moral ones); this implies that a creature that values morally abhorrent ends is intelligible. However, on the other hand, I will argue that once we introduce rudimentary assumptions concerning human nature, “organic form” entails that humans cannot disregard morality.⁹ To argue for that conclusion, I will first show that, unlike other formal principles, organic form provides a means of distinguishing between moral and non-moral ends. Then, I will take up the fraught question of why human agents should care about what morality prescribes.

⁶ Note that in the context of this section, I’m only concerned with other value-formalist accounts. Clearly, the question of the authority of morality is widely discussed, and the debate includes all contemporary ethical approaches—from realism to emotivism. Typically, the debate is coached in terms of internal and external moral reasons; where externalists hold that morality doesn’t provide reasons for agents, as such (e.g., Caligula isn’t moved by morality), and internalists argue to the contrary. See Stephen Darwall “Reasons, Motives, and the Demands of Morality: An Introduction” in *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches*. Ed. Darwall, Stephen L., Allan. Gibbard, and Peter Albert. Railton (New York: Oxford University Press) 1997: 305-312. For a bold formulation of the externalist position, see Philippa Foot in her earlier work “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” and “Reasons for Action and Desires.” Famously, later in her career, Foot recanted her views and argued for the opposite position. For her recantation and her internalist turn, see “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?” in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, no. 15 (January 1995); and “Recantation 1994” in *Moral Discourse and Practice*. P. 322.

⁷ See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.

⁸ See Street, “What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?”

⁹ On this level of description, my view is similar to the one advanced by some neo-Kantians, who grant the possibility of a rational creature for whom morality does not hole (like the coherent Caligula), while asserting that it is not a *human* possibility due to the fact of reason (or the feeling of moral respect). See, for example, Stephen Engstrom *The Form of Practical Knowledge: A Study of the Categorical Imperative* (Harvard University Press, 2009): 242-244 and Clara Bagnoli, “Morality as practical knowledge.” *Analytic Philosophy* 53, no. 1 (2012): 61-70. My view, however, does not rest in anything like moral sentiments but rather on assumptions on the nature of psychology.

5.2 Distinguishing the Moral Realm

The first thing to note is that the failure to meet the distinction requirement is more fundamental than questions such as, “Why should I be moral?” or “Is coherent Caligula possible?” for these questions are not even *intelligible* in the absence of a distinction between what is moral and what is not. According to the argument of the second chapter, the formal principles we have considered, fail to draw this kind of distinction. First in order, then, is the task of showing that, unlike these principles, organic form is capable of drawing a line between moral and non-moral ends. Ultimately, I will argue that organic form affords this kind of distinction (in a number of ways), once we introduce a couple of uncontroversial assumptions concerning human nature. But first, I wish to argue that a rudimentary distinction of the moral realm is established even without appealing to human nature, namely, by reflecting on the “organic form” alone.

This is the form my argument shall take: Since organic form accounts for subjective value, namely, for what is valuable from the agential view point,¹⁰ it can support a distinction between what is right and wrong in relation to others. The idea is quite simple; if a principle allows us to determine what is valuable for an agent, it also allows some notion of what it would be to wrong her or to do right by her. Hence, we can distinguish between moral, immoral, and permissible ends, in terms of how they impact agents. An end is moral (in a certain respect)¹¹ if it furthers or sustains other agents’ organically formed system of ends. It is immoral (in a certain respect) if it inhibits or harms other

¹⁰ It is important not to conflate the notion of subjective value and that of egoistic values. As we have noted before, subjective value can consist of ends, such as care for one’s family, friends, and community. The reason it is called ‘subjective’ is because it is value considered from the agential view point, rather than from an agent independent perspective.

¹¹ What I mean by ‘in certain respect’ is that an end or an action may have more than one simple intent or impact, and hence, it may be moral in some respects and immoral or permissible from other respects. In the context of this discussion, I leave open questions concerning the overall moral status of ends and actions (e.g., whether we can have a calculus for determining the overall value of ends).

agents' pursuit of organically formed ends. And it is morally permissible if it neither furthers nor inhibits other agents' organically formed ends. Thus, Charles' sister wrongs him if she aims at (and acts toward) putting an end to his daily meetings with his literary group. Why? Because this literary activity (and other similar activities) belongs to his organically formed system of ends, and as such, it is valuable for him. Hence, other things being equal, his sister's intention is one that goes against what is valuable for Charles, and as such, it is immoral (to a certain extent). By the same token, if Charles' sister, instead, actively supports his literary engagements, then she does right by him, and in this respect, her actions are morally commendable.

We can further develop this conception of morality. Thus, the moral status of actions and ends is determined not only by their impact on others' *actual* system of organic ends but also by their impact on others' capacity to develop and sustain an organically formed system of ends. Hence, even though parents do not inhibit any actually organically formed ends by limiting their children social interactions, they do act immorally since their actions injure the children's developing valuable ends, such as friendships. Moreover, we can designate some ends and actions as morally commendable if they have a generally beneficial (or harmful) effect on others' organically formed system of ends (or their capacity to develop such a system). Thus, torture and physical mutilation are, arguably, harmful in general, for they harm agents' capacity to pursue or develop their organically formed system of ends.

From reflecting on "organic form" alone, we can also see that valuable ends conform to something like the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean; namely, they are to be pursued in the 'right way'—neither too much or too little. This follows from the fact that, in an organic whole, ends further and support each other. Indeed, the very content of a valuable end is determined by its furthering and supporting relations to other ends; and hence, the right degree to pursue a valuable end, is to the degree it supports and sustains other valuable ends. What emerges, resembles the doctrine of the

mean: Valuable ends are excessively pursued when they harm, or lead to the neglect of, other valuable ends. They are pursued deficiently if they fall short of supporting other valuable ends. We may say, accordingly, the “organic form” makes it implausible that any valuable end is such that it needs to be *maximized*. In its nature, organically formed ends consist of internal limits determined by the agent’s whole of valuable ends.¹²

A conception of morality, based on our formal understanding of subjective value, can be further developed but, ultimately, it is limited. While it provides a rudimentary notion of wrong and right doing, it seems implausible that it can support some aspects of moral theory that ethicists often see as essential, such as categorical prohibitions and duties, guidance for resolving moral dilemmas, and vindication of fundamental moral maxims. Perhaps most crucially, the limited conception of morality supported by “organic form” (alone) does not assist in accounting for moral motivation—i.e., it does not explain if and why, any agent should care about doing right by others and avoiding wronging them. I will argue presently that once we introduce a couple of assumptions concerning human nature, “organic form” does satisfy some of these requirements. But before I turn to that, notice that even the limited notion of morality afforded by the “organic form” (without any further assumptions), exceeds significantly what other formal principles (e.g., “consistence” and “universalization”) make available. For as I have shown, these principles do not support *any* notion of morality (unless they presuppose that some ends are valuable), namely, they fail altogether to distinguish between moral and non-moral ends (or maxims). Indeed, they cannot even establish the distinction between what is valuable and non-valuable from the agential point of view (subjective

¹² A similar logic holds for organs. Organs rarely (if ever) function well when they maximize a certain metric. Thus, a heart does not function ‘better’ the more blood it pumps. The right functioning of the heart is determined by the needs of the animal (and the species) and it is optimal when it serves these needs in the best way.

value) and, hence, they cannot possibly support even the rudimentary conception of morality afforded by organic form.

5.3 Ethics and Human Nature

The rudimentary conception of morality would be of very limited worth if it cannot vindicate basic moral judgment we normally hold, and even more crucially, if it cannot explain why anybody should care about morality. As I mentioned before, “organic form” alone cannot achieve much more than the above rudimentary conception of morality, but much more can be established if we introduce a couple of uncontroversial assumptions about human nature (already familiar from the third chapter): That we are creatures that acquire values through habituation, and that there are certain characteristic natural human inclinations. I will argue that these assumptions yield a substantial support for morality once combined with “organic form.” Here is the general line of thought I will pursue: If we take into account the aforementioned assumptions, it becomes much harder, if not impossible, to imagine how certain abominable inclinations might integrate organically with basic human natural inclinations (like the need for warmth, love, and companionship) and with features of our form of life (like the need to cooperate with others and respect them). And according to organic holism, ends that do not integrate with other ends are *not valuable*. We may say, therefore, that the fact that, as humans, we are habituated into a form of life, and the fact that we have certain natural inclinations delimit (but not fully determine) what ends can be valuable for creatures like us. Accordingly, our nature (natural inclinations and habituation) provides what may be called a “soft-determination” of our values, including moral values. By that I mean that though our nature does not fully determine what is valuable for each human being, it does determine that certain types of ends are generally valuable for us (like taking care of our body and caring for members of our community) and others are abhorrent (like

harming our body and hating our community). Among these *naturally* valuable and abhorrent ends are also moral and immoral ends.

This line of argument invites many worries and objections, which I will address later. But first, I wish to provide a few illustrations of what I mean by a soft-determination of values by the facts of human nature. Human beings, by natural inclination, are social creatures; we desire the company of other human beings, we seek warmth and acceptance from others, and furthermore, we rely on others for our physical sustenance because, to some extent, we depend on others' in securing basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, and protection.

Now, importantly, these basic needs and inclinations do not *determine* what is valuable for us. But they do demarcate the general physiognomy of value in human life. First, in organic holism, as we have seen in the third chapter, one's set of desired ends (or inclinations) constitutes one's *potentially* valuable ends. Accordingly, our natural human set of inclinations constitutes a set of human potentially valuable ends. If nurtured properly, these inclinations become actually valuable through integrating with other ends into an organic whole. Hence, in cases of successful habituation, human natural inclinations develop into actually valuable ends. Moreover, as valuable ends, they also permeate and determine other valuable ends, since in an organic whole, valuable ends determine the contents of each other.¹³ Second, some ends are incompatible with our basic needs, and as such, they have no part in an organically formed system of ends.¹⁴ Thus, if one develops a wish to physically and emotionally harm family members, it would undermine one's capacity to obtain human care, warmth, and

¹³ This is an aspect of organic holism I have sometimes referred to as the "intrinsic nature of organic justification." Valuable ends are ends whose very content consists of organic justifications, namely, justifications by other ends that belong to the agent's organic whole of ends.

¹⁴ One may object that even if there are certain human natural inclinations, we may suppress or overcome them in one way or another. I don't have a philosophical argument against this objection. However, I believe that some of the natural inclinations I discuss in the rest of the chapter are extremely hard to eradicate. Another objection is that an agent may have an organically formed whole of ends that does not include his human natural inclinations. Even if such an organic whole is imperfect, it still suffices to establish valuable ends. Now, if natural inclinations are responsible to some human moral values, then such an agent will lack morality, while retaining the capacity to value. I discuss this kind of agent (which I call "scoundrels") in section 5.5.

acceptance. Similarly, aiming at the disintegration of one's community, shall undermine one's capacity to secure basic sustenance. Such ends, in other words, undermine basic needs and inclinations that human nature dictates. As such, they do the opposite of what is required from ends in an organically formed system. Namely, rather than supporting and sustaining other ends, they undercut the pursuit of other ends. This means we have justifications *not* to hold such ends; and since, according to organic holism, organically justified ends are valuable, such ends are counter valuable—they are abhorrent.

Notice, moreover, that some of the Aristotelian virtues follow from the introduction of basic human vulnerabilities to organic holism. Courage is valuable because human beings are susceptible to all kind of dangers and threats (bodily and others). In the face of danger, to pursue a valuable end *in the right way* means to pursue it courageously. To pursue it *in the right way* means to pursue the end according to its intrinsic justifications; namely, in a way that furthers and supports other valuable ends. This way of defining courage also allows us to explain what it means that an end is pursued in the right way (courageously), excessively (rashly), or deficiently (cowardly). Consider this example: On his way to visit a sick friend, Noah encounters a pack of stray dogs. If he doesn't pass directly through them, he'll need to take such a long detour that his friend will be asleep by the time he reaches her house. Now, if it does not excessively jeopardize other valuable ends, such as Noah's health and the health of the stray dogs (Noah loves dogs), trying to pass through the pack is courageous. However, if the risk to his (and the dogs') health is not that great, and the visit to the sick friend is very important, then the decision not to pass through it is cowardly. On the other hand, if the stray dogs are very menacing and Noah can also visit his friend tomorrow, then passing through the dogs is rash. What decides whether an action is courageous, cowardly, or rash is Noah's organic whole of ends. And to pursue an end in the right way (e.g., visiting a sick friend) in the face of danger means to pursue it courageously. We see, then, that given the human susceptibility to dangers, courage is justified by organic holism—it follows directly from what it is to pursue organically formed ends in the right way.

It is even easier to see how moderation is valuable, according to organic holism. For, to pursue any organically formed end means to pursue it neither excessively nor deficiently. This formal variant of the doctrine of the mean follows from contemplation on the organic form *alone*, as I have argued in the previous section. Applying this formal doctrine of the mean to the human vulnerability to inordinate appetites yields the familiar virtue of moderation. Thus, eating immoderately, is eating in a way that fails to support and further the other valuable ends.¹⁵

Finally, we can say even more about morality if we take into consideration the fact that human beings acquire valuable ends through habituation. For ends that are detrimental for habituation are, as such, ends that we have justifications not to have. Thus, contempt and ungratefulness toward others (especially caretakers) are subversive for habituation and so are traits such as extreme obstinacy and conceit.

It is important to remember what the previous illustration intended to establish. The point was not to prove that any human being must abide by the values mentioned above. Rather, the idea was to show that by introducing uncontroversial assumptions about human nature, we arrive at a richer conception of morality than the rudimentary one established through the purely formal reflection proposed in the previous section. My discussion so far does not exclude the possibility of

¹⁵ My goal here has been limited to indicating how some familiar virtues follow from the introduction of basic assumptions about human vulnerability and organic holism. However, I believe that organic holism may also assist in understanding constitutive connection between the doctrine of the mean and practical rationality. The doctrine of the mean submits that virtue is a mean state between excess and deficiency, and this raises the question, what constitutes any state as middle, excessive, or deficient? Unless we assume that we know intuitively what a mean state is, we must be able to rationally explain (i.e., give reasons) what a state is neither excessive nor deficient. Now, according to organic holism, it is in the *nature* of valuable ends that the ‘right’ (or ‘mean’) way of pursuing them is justified by other valuable ends. Indeed, the core claim of my view is that in pursuing a valuable end, the agent is rationally active, which means that she pursues it in a way that is intrinsically justified. These justifications are the ones that ground what it means to act rightly; neither excessively nor deficiently. Against this background, virtues like courage and moderation are understood as habits that allow human agents to pursue valuable ends in the face of characteristic human vulnerabilities, like dangers and inordinate appetites. To conclude, my view links rationality and the doctrine of the mean through the notion of an organic whole of ends. In thinking about these matters, I am indebted to Anselm Müller’s brilliant paper “Aristotle’s Conception of Ethical and Natural Virtue. How the Unity Thesis Sheds Light on the Doctrine of the Mean”, in J Szaif and M. Lutz-Bachmann (edd.): *Was ist das für den Menschen Gute? Menschliche Natur und Güterlehre / What Is Good for a Human Being? Human Nature and Values*, Berlin / New York: de Gruyter 2004, pp. 18-53.

the “scoundrel” who just doesn’t care about moral values. What I wished to show is that even the “scoundrel” can distinguish between what is, in general, valuable for human beings and, therefore, to recognize what harms human beings in general. I will argue later that human beings, as such (scoundrels included), do care about morality. What I do not intend to argue, at any point, is that human values and morality hold for *non*-human creatures. My account leaves open the possibility that creatures of a wholly different nature and form of life, can organically integrate (and hence, value) ends we consider loathsome. The only thing we can know about such creatures *a priori*, is that what is valuable for them, qua rational animals, are organically formed ends. Hence, our *a priori* knowledge about their values is limited to what we can derive from reflecting on organic form alone, as we did in the previous section. Thus, we know that to wrong another would mean to act against his organically formed whole of ends and also that valuable ends resist maximization. Yet, to know anything more substantive, we must know something contentful about the nature of such creatures.¹⁶

Now, that other entirely foreign life forms may have different systems of valuable ends that we do not share (and perhaps do not understand), does not strike me as counterintuitive or problematic in any other way. But it may be disappointing to ethicists with Kantian tendencies who aspire to establish, through pure reason, a kingdom of ends that reigns over all rational practical beings. Organic holism is more modest in that respect, but it is surely more ambitious than Humean accounts. While my view leaves open the possibility of other systems of values, it asserts a basic common set of valuable human ends. In doing so, it positions itself in the middle ground between the Kantian and the Humean traditions; a middle ground that is often associated with the Aristotelian tradition.

¹⁶ Unlike our human self-understanding, our understanding of foreign rational life forms will, in any case, remain a sideways-on understanding. In other words, we may develop a conception of ends that are valuable for such creatures, without seeing these ends as valuable at all for us. Our relation to the shared human values, by contrast, is immanent; we don’t only see what ends (and why) are valuable for humans, but we also value them or wish we could value them. I will elaborate on this subject in my discussion on the scoundrel (see section 5.5).

5.4 Objections

This neo-Aristotelian conception of organic form is attractive, since it provides a general rational framework that renders other (non-human) systems of value intelligible and, at the same time, supports a certain level of commonality in ethical judgments among humans. These two attractive aspects of the proposed view correspond to two distinct parts of organic holism—the formal and the contentful parts: “Organic form” provides the general rational framework (that applies also for other rational animals, if such exist), while the assumptions about human nature support a common human ethical outlook. But that organic holism consists of these two parts (i.e., formal and contentful) also raises two serious objections. First, can’t other value-formalist accounts achieve similar results by introducing assumptions on human nature? After all, didn’t we see, in the second chapter, that once we presuppose valuable ends (e.g., basic human values) principles such as “universalization” and “systematization” can construct valid moral judgments? And, second, are such assumptions legitimate in the context of value-formalism? For, didn’t we turn to value-formalism precisely to avoid any kind of normative naturalism?¹⁷

In this section, I will argue that other value-formalist accounts cannot legitimately appeal to human nature, but that organic holism can. Why is appealing to human nature, generally, illegitimate in the context of value formalism? The reason is that in value formalism, ends are valuable only where they are justified. Hence, the fact that, qua the natural beings, we have certain inclinations cannot determine what is valuable for us. According to value-formalism (and more generally, value-rationalism), such naturally desired ends (like any other ends) are valuable *only* if they are justified; that is, they must conform to a principle of construction (e.g., “consistence” or “universalization”). Accordingly, that certain inclinations, needs, or processes are natural for the kind of beings we are, plays no direct role in determining what is valuable for an agent. How, then, can organic holism, being

¹⁷ Recall that in the first chapter (section 1.5), we rejected non-rationalistic value-essentialism.

a kind of value-formalism, legitimately derive valuable ends (and prohibited ends) through introducing assumptions on human nature?

The crux of my answer will turn on the following point (which has been established in the third chapter): Unlike other kinds of value-formalism, organic holism is a generative account of value; that is, it accounts for the manner in which non-justified ends (e.g., merely desired) *develop* into valuable ends. It is this generative aspect of my account that makes it possible to legitimately and meaningfully introduce assumptions on human nature. For we do not need to presuppose illicitly that natural desired ends are valuable; rather, like other desired ends, we conceive of them as *potentially* valuable. And, like other desired ends, they are *actually* valuable through a process of organic integration. Hence, once naturally desired ends are *actually* valuable, they are no longer “natural” in any alarming sense, since they are infused with reasons (i.e., rationally active). For what is alarming about treating natural inclinations as valuable is that it seems like we consider non-rational-merely-given ends as valuable. But this alarming notion of natural values is avoided by virtue of the generative nature of organic holism. Take, for example, the natural desire for food. If things go well, eating is not merely a brute need that we must tend to a couple of times a day. Rather, through one’s habituation, one *values* eating and desires eating in the right way, namely, in a way conducive for one’s whole of organically formed ends.

We see, then, that organic holism provides the conceptual framework that allows us to incorporate natural inclinations into our system of valuable ends, without relying in any way on a specious inference from nature to value. For what is given naturally isn’t as such valuable, but rather, it is potentially valuable; it is actually valuable only once it is rationally transformed through a process of organic integration.

Above, I claimed that natural human inclinations are only one kind of source of moral ends; habituation is another. We have seen, above, that certain ends and traits of character are justified (or

rejected) by virtue of being conducive (or harmful) for habituation. Thus, a certain level of respect and gratitude toward caregivers is commended, while obstinacy and conceit are condemned. Now, deriving valuable ends from the notion of habituation raises a new worry: Unlike the case of natural inclinations, here, the worry is not that we infer value from nature (or from something merely *given*), since habituation provides *justification* for having certain ends and traits. Rather, the worry is that ends that are conducive for habituation are valuable in virtue of furthering habituation rather than being *intrinsically* valuable. Thus, it would seem that if respecting caretakers (like, parents, educators, spiritual leaders) is valuable because it is conducive for the process of forming valuable ends, then it is merely *instrumentally* valuable—not valuable qua a final end. For, recall that by the lights of organic holism, intrinsically valuable ends are justified *desired* ends; accordingly, ends that are not desired are not intrinsically valuable. But this would mean that ends, such as not being overly obstinate and vain, are not valuable but merely useful or instrumental; and this is not how we normally understand our moral values.¹⁸

The worry, then, is that unless one happens to also desire ends that are conducive for habituation, they are not intrinsically valuable ends but merely derivatively (instrumentally) valuable ones. But this is a problem only if we assume that one's desires are fixed and beyond the reach of human agency. For, only on this assumption, we cannot acquire the desire for ends that are conducive for habituation. And this, I claim, is a false assumption. While it is true that we cannot desire by fiat, it isn't true that we are incapable of shaping our (or others') desires. Seeing that a child shows little (or no) interest in communal activities (e.g., religious rituals or communal baseball game), we may help to increase her excitement in a number of ways: by associating the activity with ends she already desires

¹⁸ The same difficulty arises also in relation to my discussion of virtues like courage and moderation. For I have argued only that they are *justified* by organic holism (once we introduce characteristic human vulnerabilities), not that they are naturally *desired* or that we are naturally inclined to be courageous or moderate. Hence, although my response to the difficulty in the next paragraph refers only to ends justified by habituation, it applies also to the case of virtues.

(like spending time with her friends); or by making conspicuous the delight *we* take in the activity (with the hope it is transmitted to her); or by making her proud about her participation in communal activities. Adults' desires are susceptible to similar psychological methods (with embarrassingly mild modifications), and that these methods are effective is perhaps nowhere more striking than in the success of advertising techniques. A more benevolent practice that is also based on the malleability of our desires, we find in various forms of psychological therapy. Finally, adults can self-apply these methods, and they often do. A common example is one's attempt to desire activities valued by one's spouse or activities one sees as benevolent and conducive for other valuable ends.¹⁹ Thus, I may start volunteering as a tutor of underprivileged children because I value the end of equality of opportunities. By and by, through the inspiration I find in the work of co-teachers and the joy I take in seeing the children improve, I may develop a desire for teaching. Having seen that desire acquisition is possible,²⁰ we can put to rest the worry that ends and character traits required for habituation are merely instrumentally valuable. While it may be true that agents have no natural desire for certain ends, these desires can be encouraged in them and turn into valuable desires through habituation.

In this section, I first argued that organic holism provides a framework in which natural inclinations are the source of valuable ends, without speciously deriving value from nature. Then, I showed that ends that are instrumentally justified by human nature (specifically the need for habituation) can be rendered intrinsically valuable through the processes of desire-acquisition. Hence, human nature endows us with inherent desired ends whose value is actualized through habituation and, on the other hand, with ends that are justified and can be valuable if they are also desired. These naturally valuable ends provide a contentful basis for morality (and human ethics more generally) that

¹⁹ My interest in these possibilities of evaluative-growth is indebted to Agnes Callard's work on aspiration. See Agnes Callard *Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁰ Note that I do not argue that desire-acquisition *must* be possible. The possibility of this and other kinds of desire-acquisition is known *empirically*. That we can change in this way is, I believe, a familiar human experience and the condition of possibility for many human practices that aim at such change (e.g., psychological therapy and advertising).

conjoins the rudimentary moral principles established through the formal aspect of organic holism.²¹ Together, these considerations provide a significant first step toward an organic moral theory.

5.5 The Scoundrel

This first step furnishes us with a distinction between moral and non-moral ends and with an understanding of what ends are, in general, valuable for human beings as such. Moreover, it also answers in the negative (though not conclusively) the question whether coherent Caligula is possible. The argument against this possibility is that human beings cannot have an organic character that consists of desires of the sort ascribed to Caligula.²² For by introducing the above assumptions on human nature, it follows that certain ends are excluded from what can be valuable for human beings, since they are incompatible with either natural human inclinations or organic habituation. Accordingly, desiring the torture of human beings is an end that necessarily harms the pursuit of human warmth and approval.

This is an argument against the possibility of an *organic* Caligula. But it doesn't touch on another crucial question: Why should Caligula, or anybody whose character is far from being ideally organic (i.e., a *scoundrel*), care about what is moral?²³ The contemporary discussion of this question is defined by an ongoing debate between two opposed positions: Internalists about moral reasons hold that even

²¹ See previous section.

²² This, as I mentioned, leaves open the possibility of an *alien* Caligula, namely, an alien whose character consist of sadistic desires.

²³ The sting of the question is somewhat dulled in the case that the scoundrel cannot care about anything since he values nothing. According to the view I advance, this might indeed be the case. For, organic holism is an account of subjective value, on which, if one's character isn't organically formed, one does not have valuable ends. A scoundrel, whose ends are not organically formed, does not truly value anything, and hence, we may question the very notion that value and care are relevant to a scoundrel. For that reason, in what comes next, I shall regard the question of moral authority in relation to non-pure scoundrels; namely, I will discuss characters who are far from being fully organic but are organically integrated to a limited extent.

the scoundrel has reasons to be moral; externalists maintain that she doesn't.²⁴ In general, ethicists who endorse externalism are impressed by the scoundrel's apparent utter lack of regard for the demands of morality.²⁵ By contrast, internalists are often struck by the notion that if morality is objectively valuable, then it is also valuable (and hence, reasons-giving) for the scoundrel. A *locus classicus* of this debate is between Phillipa Foot's later internalist position and her earlier defense of the externalist position. In defense of externalism, she argued earlier in her career that the directives of morality are hypothetical imperatives rather than categorical ones and, hence, that whether an agent has reasons to pursue moral ends depends on his subjective motivational set.²⁶ Later in her career, Foot recanted her externalism in favor of her neo-Aristotelian variant of internalism.²⁷ In its core, her conversion turns on a simple point: The rules of morality constitute basic human good, and for that reason humans, qua humans, have reasons to act morally.²⁸

Organic holism walks a middle path between externalism and internalism in a way that integrates the externalist's conviction that the scoundrel doesn't have reasons to act morally and the

²⁴ The terms internalism and externalism may be quite confusing here, since they are very often used in a slightly different context that goes back to Bernard Williams' "Internal and External Reasons." There, Williams calls "internal reasons" reasons that can be traced to one's subjective motivational set. External reasons (whose intelligibility he questions) hold for the agent, regardless of the agent's subjective motivation set. By contrast, the distinction that interests us here concerns the relation between morality and reasons. Internalism about moral reasons is the thesis that moral duties are reasons-giving for every agent, regardless of the agent's subjective motivational set. By contrast, externalism about moral reasons is the rejection of this thesis. Notice that it is possible (and even natural) to be an internalist in the sense that concerns us but an externalist in Williams' sense. Thus, Phillipa Foot, in her later work, is internalist about moral reasons but externalist in Williams' sense, since she maintains that one has reasons to act morally *regardless* of one's subjective motivational set. For a useful discussion of the various internal/external distinctions, see Stephen Darwall "Reasons, Motives, and the Demands of Morality: An Introduction," 305-312.

²⁵ David Lewis writes: "Why care about objective value or ethical reality? The sanction is that if you do not, your inner states will fail to deserve folk-theoretical names. Not a threat that will strike terror into the hearts of the wicked! But whoever thought that philosophy could replace the hangman?" David Lewis, "Desire as Belief II" *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 105, No. 418 (Apr., 1996), p. 307.

²⁶ See Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" *The Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972): 305-316 and "Reasons for Action and Desires" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 46 (1972): 189-210.

²⁷ For her recantation and her internalist turn, see "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?" and "Recantation 1994," 322.

²⁸ This view is developed in her *Natural Goodness* and draws on Michael Thompson's *Life and Action*. Introduction and part I.

internalist's sense that morality is relevant for every human being, as such.²⁹ I will argue, like externalists, that the scoundrel does not have reasons to pursue moral ends, but like internalists, I shall argue that, qua a human being, she can nevertheless recognize the superiority of the virtuous disposition to hers and conceive of a reason to *become* moral. That she doesn't have reasons to pursue moral ends follows quite naturally from my view because, according to organic holism, reasons (i.e., justifications)³⁰ stem from organically formed ends, and being a scoundrel, her organically formed ends (if she has any) are not moral.³¹ Much less clear is my internalist claim that, qua human, the scoundrel has a reason to *become* the kind of person for whom moral ends are organically formed (and hence, valuable).

To understand this claim, we first need to explicate the distinction between having reasons to pursue moral ends (or to act morally) and having a reason to *become* a moral person. This distinction, according to organic holism, is the distinction between the reasons given by one's organically formed desired ends and the reasons one has for obtaining certain organically formed desired ends. Accordingly, one may have a reason to acquire certain organically desired ends (i.e. valuable ends), without already having reasons to act on these ends. Consider the following example: Keren loves her partner Abner and, all in all, they share an ethical worldview; that is, they value more or less similar ends. But Keren simply does not care for community theater, which Abner holds dear. Community theater, for Keren, is not a source of justifications. She may go to see performances and help the company in various way, but it will not be because she *values* these activities, but rather, because she loves Abner and sees justifications to support his organically formed ends. But while community

²⁹ I should note that it is not trivial that the relevant kind that determines what is internally valuable is human beings. Considering human beings as the relevant kind is only one variant of internalism—the one promoted by Foot and other neo-Aristotelians like MacIntyre and Geach. See, Alasdair MacIntyre *Dependent Rational Animals*, and Peter Geach *The Virtues: The Stanton Lectures 1973-74* (CUP Archive, 1977). By contrast, neo-Kantian internalism takes the relevant genus to be rational agency. See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.

³⁰ Recall that in this dissertation “justification” is synonymous with “normative reasons.”

³¹ Indeed, this is what a scoundrel is by stipulation.

theater is not an end she values, she does have a reason to become the kind of person who actually values community theater. For surely, given that she is anyway engaged in theater-related ends, it would be far better if she would also value theater.

The case of the scoundrel is similar. For, qua a human being, she shares with other humans certain natural inclinations, such as need of warmth, company, social approval, and dependence on others for her sustenance. What makes her a scoundrel is that these inclinations have not been organically integrated, and hence, she does not value them. However, they are not gone. She still depends on interaction with other human beings to secure her material existence, social status, and emotional stability. She may despise her physician and the produce vendor at the market, but still she cannot altogether avoid relying on their services. She may also harbor contempt for human emotional frailty and hate the fact that she cannot be entirely independent of human approval and love, but it is very rare that these needs are wholly irradiated. Hence, the state of the scoundrel is one in which the basic human inclinations still exist, but instead of being valued, they are, for her, a constant nuisance. Now, like Keren and the community theater, the scoundrel can, simultaneously, see no value in respecting other people and still see why it would be better to be the kind of person who values and respects people.

That the scoundrel has a reason to become moral does not yet mean that she *can* become so. As we have seen above, one might have only a limited and indirect control on one's inclinations and desires. Moreover, it does not follow from my argument that the scoundrel even has a decisive reason (or all-things-considered reason) to become moral. All I argued for is that she has *a* reason, not an overriding or all-things-considered reason. There may be many real-life constraints that lead the scoundrel not to embark on a rehabilitative journey toward morality. Take, for example, the famous mob boss, Tony Soprano. There are many considerations that disallow Tony to try and become moral. First and foremost, he is up to his neck with urgent mob activities, the foundering of which may very

probably cost him his livelihood, his status, and even the life of his friends and family. That being the case, he cannot afford undertaking the onerous and unpredictable process of character changing. All the more so where the change is toward a moral character, since caring about morality will almost certainly weaken him as a mob boss, and as we've just noted, he cannot risk failing at his job, given what is at stake. What's more, being a mob boss isn't a job just anybody can do successfully; it requires a very distinct psychological makeup, and many times, like in Tony's case, what makes him excellent in his job is extreme levels of emotional suppression.³² This sort of character is especially unmalleable to the influence of standard methods of psychic development, as his unsuccessful psychoanalytic therapy demonstrates.

These considerations and others make the case that Tony does not act on his reason to become moral. But it does not imply that he has *no* reason to become moral. Indeed, Tony is capable of seeing that the life of the virtuous person is preferable. Only that for him, given his life circumstances and psychological makeup, it is not a viable option. Yet, that he sees virtuous life as preferable is expressed in the way he chooses to raise his children. He strives to keep them away from mob life and hopes to see them developing into virtuous adults. Had he thought that the life of a mob boss is generally preferable to the virtuous life, he would have habituated them into mob life.³³ This comes to show that one can, at the same time, recognize that being fully organic (and hence, virtuous) is preferable, yet not pursue virtuous life oneself.

Organic holism, we see, caters to both internalist and externalist sensitivities. On the one hand, it avoids the implausible internalist view on which even the scoundrel has justifications to pursue moral ends. On the other hand, it eschews the externalist unpalatable conclusion that morality is

³² Being born into a mob family, many times, provides the kind of trauma that instigates extreme suppression. It is this suppression that sends Tony to seek therapy.

³³ In a similar spirit, Fred Feldman has suggested the "crib test," which asks what sort of life I would value for my newborn insofar as I cared about her for her own sake. See Fred Feldman, "On the Advantages of Cooperativeness." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 308-23. See also, Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Ch. 8.

irrelevant at all for the scoundrel. According to organic holism, while the scoundrel doesn't hold moral values and has no reasons to pursue moral ends, she can recognize the superiority of being virtuous and she has a reason to become moral.³⁴ The case of the scoundrel brings into relief the theoretical primacy of character in organic holism. Character both determines what ends are valuable, from the agential viewpoint, and provides an objective standard, set by the character of the virtuous person—i.e., to aspire to be moral does not mean to pursue of certain ends, rather, it means to aspire to have a virtuous *character*. Does this mean that organic holism is a kind of virtue ethics? I shall take up this question, along with other questions, in the next section which will be devoted to situating organic holism within contemporary ethical theories.

5.6 Concluding: What Kind of Theory is Organic Holism?

Contemporary ethics is a field saturated, *ad nauseum*, with divisions and categorizations of theories and approaches. This state of affairs gives rise to two conflicting impressions. First, that the field is *exhaustively* charted and, hence, that every possible ethical account must be definable along pre-established theoretical divisions. However, the discussion in this section will show that organic holism does not fall neatly under preestablished categories. Another impression is that the dense overlaidness of the distinctions, as well as their staggering quantity, renders them unhelpful as means of orientation. This is, I believe, a true impression, and for that reason, I shall limit myself in this section to discuss only very general taxonomies in ethics, specifically, ones that may still be helpful for orientation. I begin with situating organic holism within the main three approaches to normative ethics.

³⁴ Note that this position is not available to other neo-Aristotelian internalists, such as Foot. In Foot's internalist account, the fact of being human, by itself, provides one with reasons to pursue moral ends. This kind of account does not leave conceptual space for the scoundrel because it does not possess a formal rational standard.

5.6.1 Organic Holism as a Variety of Virtue Ethics

For most of the twentieth century, ethicists have recognized two main approaches to normative ethics—teleological and deontological. According to the first, the answer to questions of value of actions, rules, or character traits consists in the outcome (intended or actual) of actions, rules, or character traits. According to the second approach, deontological ethics, the answers to questions of value are decided by appeal to rules or duties.³⁵ The distinction between the two approaches is often formulated as follows: According to teleological ethics, it is valuable to do what leads to good consequences. According to deontological ethics an action is right (or valuable) if it is in accordance with correct rule or duty.³⁶

Besides these two approaches, the last third of the 20th century has seen the rise of a third approach—virtue ethics. Following the publication of Anscombe’s seminal “Modern Moral Philosophy,”³⁷ an increasing number of ethicists have recognized that ethical evaluation consists in the agent’s character. Others have responded to this development in modern ethics³⁸ with suspicion, arguing that there is no logical space for a third approach beside the teleological and the deontological.³⁹ It has been argued that virtue ethics accounts are ultimately reducible to the two other approaches and, moreover, all major deontological and teleological accounts also consist of a theory of the virtuous character. Indeed, some teleological and deontological accounts even *focus* on virtue as a major evaluative category. For example, “teleological virtue ethics” is a teleological account in which

³⁵ These divisions are extremely common in textbooks in normative ethics. See, for example, Shelly Kagan *Normative Ethics* (Routledge, 2018).

³⁶ See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 26-27.

³⁷ Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”

³⁸ While the advent of virtue ethics was a novelty in the context of 20th century analytic philosophy, it is, arguably, the least novel of all approaches when considered from a wider historical perspective. From such a perspective, Anscombe instigated a revival of a tradition that draws on Plato and Aristotle.

³⁹ See, Nussbaum “Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?”, *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 163-201; Watson, “On the Primacy of Character.” For a defense of virtue ethics see, Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Introduction; and Crisp, Roger, and Michael A. Slote, “Introduction” in *Virtue ethics*. eds. Crisp, Roger, and Michael A. Slote Vol. 10 (Oxford Readings in Philosophy, 1997): 1-26. The precarious status of virtue ethics is reflected in its absence from textbooks, such as Kagan’s *Normative Ethics*.

the subject of evaluation is not acts or rules, but rather *character*. Thus, virtue utilitarianism doesn't proscribe rules or acts that maximize happiness, rather, it recommends a certain character that produces maximal happiness.⁴⁰ Such theories, though they take character as a principal element, are yet teleological, since what determines the value of character (that is, why a certain character is valuable at all) is the well-being of agents.

Hence, if virtue ethics is to constitute a third approach to normative ethics, we should expect that virtue be the primary standard of evaluation (i.e., that which *determines* what is valuable). Or, in the terms I have employed throughout the dissertation, we must conceive of virtue as *ethical justification*. This kind of theory shall determine the value of outcomes and rules by appealing to virtuous character, rather than *vice versa*. A prominent attempt to develop such a theory we find in Rosalind Hursthouse's work. She formulates the general form of a true virtue ethics must take: "An action A is right for S in circumstances C if and only if a completely virtuous agent would characteristically A in C."⁴¹ Given this formulation we may say that there are three approaches to providing ethical justification: one consists in outcomes, another in rules of conduct, and a third in character.

We can now ask, what kind of normative theory is organic holism? One may be inclined to think that it is a kind of virtue ethics, since organic form is a form of *character*. Neither actions nor ends can be organic, unless conceived in the context of a whole character. However, as we have just noted, the fact that character is a central focus of an account, does not entail that it is a variety of virtue ethics. Thus, there are forms of teleological accounts that concern character in a seemingly similar way, namely, as the primary subject of evaluation (e.g., virtue utilitarianism). This kind of focus on character does not entail that organic holism is a variety of virtue ethics. However, I will argue that,

⁴⁰ See, Kagan, *ibid*, 204-212; and Watson, *ibid*, 455.

⁴¹ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 28, and her "Virtue Ethics and Abortion," in eds. Crisp, Roger, and Michael A. Slote Vol. 10 (Oxford Readings in Philosophy, 1997): 217–38. We find a similar schema in McDowell's work. See John McDowell "Virtue and Reason." *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (July 1, 1979): 331–50.

though organic holism consists of important teleological and deontological elements, it is, ultimately, a variety of virtue ethics.

Let us look into a couple of considerations to the effect that organic holism is a teleological or deontological approach to ethics. First, according to the argument of this dissertation, organic form is an ethical justification because it accounts for *active rational identification* with ends.⁴² If this is so, then it may seem that the primary standard of evaluation is not “organic form,” but rather *active rational identification*. Organic form, is only *the way* in which active rational identification is established. This, in turn, would suggest that being organically formed is valuable not by virtue of itself but rather by virtue of what it achieves, namely, active rational identification. But then, isn’t organic holism just as teleological as virtue utilitarianism?

This proposal is based on a mistaken understanding of the relationship between identification and “organic form.” “Organic form” does not *bring about* identification (i.e., identification is not the *outcome* of organically formed character).⁴³ Rather, according to the argument of the dissertation, to pursue an organically formed end *is* to actively and rationally identify with this end; and, an organically formed agent is one who actively identifies with one’s ends. Furthermore, we can see that if we call such an agent virtuous (in the sense of having the valuable character), then organic holism should be understood as a variety of virtue ethics (rather than deontological or teleological ethics) because it conforms to Hursthouse’s aforementioned formulation: Ends and actions are valuable, since they conform to what the virtuous agent would do or aim at. In other words, the primary standard for evaluating ends and actions (i.e., the ethical justification) is understood in terms of character.

⁴² Recall that “organic form” was developed as an answer to a challenge presented by the end of the first chapter, namely, to account for active rational identification. In the second chapter, I showed that to meet this challenge, a number of requirements must be satisfied (i.e., (1) The distinction requirement, (2) the evaluative requirement and (3) overcoming the formalist dilemma) and, in later chapters, I have argued that these requirements are met by “organic form.” From this perspective, “organic form” functions as an ethical justification because it establishes active *rational* identification.

⁴³ Nor, for that matter, does it conform to the duty to actively-rationally identify, which will make it a deontological account.

But is the notion of character really essential? Why can't we understand organic holism as a kind of deontological ethics? For, isn't organic form just a formal rational principle (or rule) akin to the Kantian "universalization"? And if so, then, just like we conceive of "universalization" as a paradigmatic deontological principle, so we should understand "organic form" as a deontological principle. In both cases, it would seem we *ought* to pursue ends (or maxims) if they conform to a rational principle (be it organic or universal) and regardless of their outcome. However, organic holism doesn't sit well with this description. After all, an organically formed end is one that furthers and supports the system of the agent's organically formed ends; accordingly, we can say that it is rational and valuable *by virtue* of its (intended) outcome. And hence, it would be misleading to say that we ought to pursue an organically formed end "*regardless* of the outcome." Therefore, unlike "universalization," organic holism seems to fall under a teleological description—i.e., actions are valuable because of their (intended) outcome.

But to consider organic holism as variety of teleological ethics is just as misleading. Because, on organic holism, valuable ends are not valuable *only* because of their intended outcome; rather, they are valuable by virtue of their *intrinsic* rationality—this is what renders them actively the agent's own (and hence, subjectively valuable). Therefore, we see (again) that organic holism isn't a teleological account. What is it then? I take it that the above considerations demonstrate that organic holism *defies* the sharp distinction between deontology and teleology. Organically formed ends are valuable since they establish active rational identification, but at the same time, the organic rationality is teleological. So far, we have seen that organic holism is neither a kind of a teleological ethics, nor is it a kind of deontological ethics. Moreover, we have noted that we can justify ends only by appeal to the virtuous character. Another sense in which character is primary in organic holism is that valuable ends are *inseparable* from character; indeed, they come into being through the agent's habituation. As we have seen in the third chapter, prior to the process of habituation, desired ends are merely *potentially* valuable.

They become rational and actually valuable through their organic integration with other ends. In this kind of habituation, the valuable ends are generated together with the agent's desiderative habits. In other words, valuable ends are the formal objects of the virtuous person's desiderative habits. Thus, what it means to pursue valuable friendship is that one has the kind of organically justified robust habit that aims at friendship. This strong dependence between valuable ends and desiderative habits yields an especially strong link between character and the value of ends. For it requires not only to act *like* the virtuous person would, as Hursthouse's formula demands,⁴⁴ rather, it requires one to *be* virtuous. For pursuing an end that the virtuous person would pursue (and in identical circumstances) would still not render this end (and its pursuit) valuable. It is truly valuable only if it is pursued from a virtuous desiderative habit because, as we have seen in previous chapters, only then is it intrinsically justified.

Against this background, if one category must be chosen, it would be fair to say that organic holism is a variety of virtue ethics. However, it is surely not a typical kind. As commonly conceived, it is in the essence of virtue ethics that it designates a set of contentful virtues (often drawing on Aristotle's set of virtues). Lacking this feature, virtue ethics, for many, is unrecognizable and perhaps unattractive. It should be clear by now that organic holism does not proscribe specific virtues unless we introduce certain desired ends and characteristic vulnerabilities (like the one given by human nature). Rather than being the basic theoretical building stones, the virtues in organic holism are established by applying the organic form to human nature.

That the virtues are not secured a priori may be disappointing to mainstream virtue ethicists; however, it comes with a considerable theoretical benefit. For while more traditional varieties of virtue ethics presuppose a list of virtues, organic holism *vindicates* them. Namely, it provides an ethical

⁴⁴ Hursthouse's own theory requires also that one acts for reasons similar to the virtuous person (*On Virtue Ethics*, 32-39). On my account, this is possible only if one has a character similar to that of the virtuous person.

justification for the various virtues (or valuable ends). This is a considerable benefit since it makes it possible to defend virtue ethics against the accusation of dogmatism. According to this accusation, since the virtues are the basic building blocks of virtue ethics, they are presupposed dogmatically, rather than argued for. As a result, virtue ethics lack critical rational resources; for the set of virtues prescribed by virtue ethics cannot be rationally modified or corrected, if they are the basic theoretical building blocks.

This accusation does not cut ice with organic holism precisely because organic holism does not presuppose any contentful virtues but rather provides the formal framework into which contents (like human natural inclinations) are integrated and yield virtues. Moreover, it is this rational form that endow agents with the resources to rationally criticize their own (and others') desired ends. Thus, as we have seen in the previous section, it is by virtue of the formal aspect of organic holism that the scoundrel may recognize reasons to be virtuous and criticize his own desired ends. Hence, while the formal-rational dimension of organic holism sets it apart from more traditional virtue ethics, it is an advantage rather than a flaw.

5.6.2 Organic Holism and Metaethics

I conclude by situating organic holism in relation to the two main questions of metaethics: (1) Are ethical evaluations truth assessible (cognitivism) or are they merely expressions of preferences (non-cognitivism)? (2) Are there ethical facts (realism) or do all evaluations depend solely on the agential viewpoint? First, I'll argue that organic holism is a cognitive theory and then I'll show that, with some important caveats, it is a realist theory.

Organic holism may be mistakenly understood as a non-cognitivist theory. Non-cognitivists hold that evaluations consist in the agent's non-cognitive psychological preferences or aversions, and organic holism may seem to hold the same position. After all, in organic holism, what is valuable is

always assessed in relation to the organically formed agent, namely, to that agent's desired ends. However, that evaluation consists in the agent's psychology does not entail that it not truth assessible. I will first argue that, in organic holism, evaluations are subject to a standard of correctness, and then I'll argue that they are also truth assessible.

That evaluations in organic holism can be correct or incorrect is easy to see. Unlike paradigmatic non-cognitivism, in which evaluations are expressions of non-cognitivist pro attitudes (hurray!) and con attitudes (boo!),⁴⁵ in organic holism, valuable ends are understood as *essentially* justified and, hence, as subject to a standard of correctness in their very nature. What renders an end valuable is that it is organically justified and that these justifications are *valid*. Thus, "nurturing my friendships is valuable" is correct, if it is true that nurturing my friendships furthers and sustains my organically formed whole of ends. It is false, if nurturing friendships in fact does not further and support other of my ends, or if my character is not organically formed.

We see, then, that organic holism, by virtue of its rational nature, secures a standard of correctness for valuable ends. But are ethical judgments truth assessible? Can they be true or false? The first thing to note is that, according to organic holism, ethical judgments do not aim at *absolute* truth; that is, no judgment claims that an end is valuable universally (for every being) and without reservations. For as we have seen, what is valuable is indexed to species, form of life, and finally, to one's character. As far as my arguments in this chapter go, what is valuable may vary among different species of rational animals,⁴⁶ different life forms (or cultures), and different personalities.⁴⁷ Even at the most abstract register, namely, that of organic form alone (i.e., considered without introducing any contents), what is valuable is valuable *for* rational animals. Indeed, the notion of organic form was

⁴⁵ See, for example, C. L. Stevenson "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms." *Mind*, New Series, 46, no. 181 (January 1, 1937): 14–31; Blackburn *Spreading the Word*, and Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics*, 24-104.

⁴⁶ Assuming that there are other species of rational animals besides human beings.

⁴⁷ Thus, while writing novels is valuable for Charles, it may not be for others. Though, clearly, others can appreciate that it is valuable for Charles and value it through their valuing of Charles' life.

adopted through an analysis of what it is to value for *beings like us*, namely, for rational animals.⁴⁸ Therefore, according to organic holism, judging that an end is valuable means that it is valuable for the kind of being whose end it is. It is a constitutive part of ethical judgment that it is a judgment that concerns certain species of rational animal, certain culture, or the character of a certain agent.⁴⁹ But as long as we understand the semantics of ‘valuable end’ in this manner (indexed to a form of life, or a species etc.) it is truth assessible.

Our conclusion, then, is that organic holism is a cognitivist theory. Is it also a realist theory? Answering this question in any serious way will require entering metaphysical dispute that I will have to postpone to another occasion. Instead, I will conclude with a rather brief remark, to be developed perhaps in the future. Organic holism is not a realist theory, if by realism we mean that there are evaluative facts that are entirely independent of the agential viewpoint. However, organic holism is realist in a weaker sense, namely, in the sense that there are *facts* that make ethical judgments true. Thus, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, “having friends is valuable”⁵⁰ is made true by facts about human nature; and that “Talmudic studies are valuable” is made true by facts about Jewish culture.⁵¹ Similarly, that “writing novels is valuable for Charles” is made true by facts about Charles character, such as his other desiderative habits. Now, clearly, the kind of facts I have just invoked have no place in a purely mechanistic-physicalist metaphysics. And for philosophers who reject the reality of anything that is not reducible to physical nature (mechanistically understood), the kind of facts I have

⁴⁸ I insist on “rational animals” rather than rational beings since, as we have seen in the second chapter, in our case, valuable ends do not stem solely from pure reason, but rather, their contents originate from our inclination and desires.

⁴⁹ Following Peter Geach, we may say that ‘valuable’ is an attributive adjective, rather than predicative adjective. Being an attributive adjective means that the adjective does not have a determined sense independent of the sense it has when applied to a certain kind of thing. Thus, ‘x is a big flea’ “does not split up into ‘x is a flea’ and ‘x is big.’” (Geach, “Good and Evil”). Hence, to be ‘big’ is relative to a kind of being. Geach further argued that good is an attributive predicate, for to be a good plant or artifact has a different logic than to be a good person. Similarly, according to my view, the sense of ‘valuable’ is determined in relation to what it predicates; it varies across species of rational animals and cultures.

However, it is important to note that in the most formal register of organic holism, ‘valuable’ does have the same sense. For all *rational* animals, of all species and cultures, the sense of ‘a valuable end’ is ‘an organically formed end’.

⁵⁰ This assertion should be understood as indexed to human beings.

⁵¹ What I mean here is that Talmudic studies are valuable because they are an organic part of traditional Jewish life, not because they are commended.

invoked, are just not facts; namely, not part of what *is* real. By contrast, philosophers who hold that there is normativity in living nature, may find more plausible my claim that there are evaluative facts. However, as I mentioned above, I will have to leave this metaphysical dispute for a future occasion.

5.6 Appendix – Value-Beliefs and Compound Accounts

Recent decades have seen the rise of *compound* accounts of value. These accounts maintain that value consists in the conjunction of several constituents. Arguably, the most influential compound account is the one promoted by Nico Kolodny and Samuel Scheffler. On this account, valuing consists in a compound of three independent constituents: Belief, desire and emotion. Thus, if Joe values his family it means that (1) he believes that his family is valuable, (2) he is motivated to act for the sake of his family and, (3) he is vulnerable to a set of characteristic emotions.⁵² Since this account does not figure in the critical part of my dissertation (its first two chapters) I wish to add a few remarks here. I shall first outline the similarities and difference between the compound account and organic holism. Then I will provide a few considerations that speak in favor of my own account.

First, like the compound account, I hold that emotion and desire are both parts of valuing, though neither one is independently sufficient for valuing. Indeed, I suggest in my first chapter that desire is, in general, bound up with emotion—and this holds even for mere desire,⁵³ and since, on my account, desires are constitutive of valuing, it follows that emotions are also part of valuing. Where I differ from the compound account, however, is that I do not consider emotion and desire as two *independent* constituents whose conjunction (along with value-belief) yields valuing. Rather, on my view, valuing consists in organically formed desire, and since desire is tied with emotions, it follows that valuing is also tied with emotions.⁵⁴

⁵² I am grateful to Agnes Callard for drawing my attention to compound accounts and for sharing with me her unpublished paper “Frankenvaluers, Sticky Attitudes and Stone-Swallowing: Three Arguments Against the Hybrid Theory of Value.” that informed and inspired this appendix.

⁵³ I argued in (1.2.2) that one may feel disappointment and anger if one’s pursuit is frustrated, even if the end one pursues is non-valuable from one’s own viewpoint. Thus, if Joe finds out that the bakery has run out of baklava while he is in the midst of strongly craving sweets, Joe may feel disappointed and even sad, despite being well aware of the silliness of these emotions, given that he does not value consuming sweets and actually resents his sweet tooth.

⁵⁴ Throughout the positive part of my dissertation (chapters 3-5) I have neglected the subject of emotions, and any serious development of this subject is beyond the scope of this current project. Since I maintain that emotions are tied with desires (as such), my account will have to explain how emotions are transformed once they are part of valuing

A similar difference holds between the way organic holism and the compound account conceive of the part of beliefs (or judgment) in valuing. While in organic holism value-belief is *intrinsic* to organically formed desires and depends on them, in the compound account value-belief is conceptually *independent* of desires. Being independent means that the content of value-beliefs *need not* make any reference to desire. Accordingly, as far as the compound account goes, if someone believes that folk dance is valuable, for instance, the content of her belief might not include any mention of her (or anybody else's) actual or possible desires. By contrast, on my view, the *semantics* of value-beliefs consists in organically formed *desires*. As I have just argued (5.6.2) What it *means* to believe that something is valuable must be cashed out in terms of desired ends within an organically formed character.

To avoid a misunderstanding, notice that this difference I have just drawn between the compound account and organic holism does not concern the link between desiring x and believing that x is valuable. Both views leave room for cases in which an agent recognizes the value of x without desiring x herself. In the fifth chapter I argued that organic holism allows for such cases (in more than one way). Thus, I argued that we can appreciate that x is valuable for another species of rational animals and that the scoundrel can acknowledge that certain ends are valuable even though she doesn't desire them herself. Similarly, Scheffler, in developing his compound account, distinguishes between believing that something is valuable and valuing it. He writes, "There are, for example, many activities that I regard as valuable but which I myself do not value, including, say, folk dancing, bird-watching, and studying Bulgarian history. Indeed, I value only a tiny fraction of the activities that I take to be valuable."⁵⁵ On Scheffler's account, believing that something is valuable but not valuing it means that

rather than mere desiring. One feature of such transformation is strongly suggested by the rational nature of valuable desires; since valuable desires are rational (organically formed), then it should seem plausible that emotions tied with valuable desires are also be infused with rationality—unlike emotions that are tied with mere desires.

⁵⁵ Scheffler, *Equality and Tradition*, 21.

one's value-belief is unaccompanied by the desire and emotional vulnerability that are required for *valuing*. What distinguishes my view from the compound view is that in organic holism even when I do not myself value something, my belief that it is valuable consists in seeing it as the object of an organically formed *desire*. The compound view draws no necessary link between the semantics of value-belief and desires.

Finally, like the compound account, my view also maintains that if an agent values *x*, he does not merely desire *x*, but also *believes* that *x* is valuable. Again though, the difference between my organic holistic account, and the compound account is that while in organic holism value-belief is *intrinsic* to the kind of desire involved in valuing (i.e., organically formed desire), on the compound account, believing that *x* is valuable is independent from the desire involved in valuing *x*.

To clarify this difference, it is helpful to note the reductive (or additive) nature of compound accounts. On a reductive view, valuing is reducible to three components that are *independent* of each other. This means that each of these components remains identical both within valuing and outside of valuing. Accordingly, desiring *x* without valuing *x*, is identical to desiring *x* while valuing *x*; the difference between the two cases is just that in valuing, one also believes that *x* is valuable and, additionally, one is emotionally vulnerable to *x*. By contrast, organic holism is a non-reductive view. If an agent values *x*, his desire to *x* is inseparable from the belief that *x* is valuable. For in valuing *x*, the agent desires *x* organically, and desiring something organically entails that the agent sees justifications to pursue *x* in the way he does.⁵⁶ Furthermore, as I have argued in 5.6.2., this entails that in valuing, desire is not a mere psychological motivation, but rather a rational engagement that is as such *cognitive*—it has a standard of correctness and it is truth-assessable.

⁵⁶ See section 4.6.

To conclude, while organic holism and the compound account agree that valuing consists of emotion, desire and belief, the compound account is reductive, and organic holism is not. However, having clarified the difference between these views still does not vindicate one in favor of the other. I will conclude by offering two considerations in support of my view.

First, as I have just stressed, the compound account rests on the notion of value-belief that is *independent* of emotion and desire. But what, then, renders value-beliefs true? Why is one end valuable and another isn't? Whatever answers this question is what I have been calling *ethical justification*, and as we have seen, my dissertation constitutes an argument to the effect that ethical justification consists in *organically formed desire*. This argument entails that believing that x is valuable means that, in some sense, x is organically desired, because being organically desired *is* what renders ends valuable. Hence, the argument of my dissertation, if it holds, is tantamount to the rejection of the compound account position that value-belief is intelligible independently from desire.

We may say, accordingly, that my dissertation as a whole constitutes an argument against the reductive position of the compound account. There is, however, one caveat to this rejection: In the critical part of my dissertation, Chapters 1 and 2, I considered only four of the five approaches to ethical justification, leaving out the intuitionist approach. Consequently, my argument does not apply to an intuitionist variant of the compound account, namely, an account in which value-beliefs rest on a special faculty of value-intuition. There are well known and powerful arguments against value-intuitionism, but since I have not discussed them in the dissertation, I grant that an intuitionist compound view is currently immune to my argument.

I turn now to the second consideration in favor of organic holism. As I noted above, in a reductive framework, desiring x is identical whether or not one also values x.⁵⁷ This implies that the

⁵⁷ This part of my argument draws on Agnes Callard's talk "Frankenvaluers, Sticky Attitudes and Stone-Swallowing: Three Arguments Against the Hybrid Theory of Value."

desires involved in bizire scenarios (like radioman’s desire to turn on radios) and the desires involved in valuing are, in themselves, indistinguishable. This seems like an unattractive consequence of the compound view, because we do not experience our desire to pursue what is valuable for us (e.g., family life) as similar to our motivation in cases of compulsions or whims. Thus, it would seem strange to say that what distinguishes Joe’s compulsive attraction to sweets and his desire for good family life is only that he doesn’t *believe* that sweets are valuable but does believe that family life is valuable. When we pursue ends we value, the way we are motivated to pursue them is determined by the *value* we see in them—that is, by our value-belief. We may say, accordingly, that in cases of valuing, desire is sensitive to the value-belief. But the compound account does not cater to this intuition; in a compound account, what motivates Joe to pursue the well-being of his family and his belief that family life is valuable can be entirely separate mental states. As far as the compound account goes, this is a perfectly legitimate case of valuing.

To bring the point home, let us imagine the following case: There are many activities and ends Sam regards as valuable but which he does not *value*, “including, say, folk dancing, bird-watching, and studying Bulgarian history.”⁵⁸ He also has various desires he does not take to be valuable at all, including the agonizing compulsion to locate three objects of the same kind in any room he enters (e.g., three chairs or three pens). To get rid of the three-objects compulsion, he decides to go through an experimental procedure that promises to rid one of one’s compulsions. Back at home after having undergone this procedure, he is elated to be liberated form the three-object compulsion. His elation is short-lived, though, as he discovers that his compulsive tendencies have only shifted their object; now, he has a compulsive urge to run immediately to the library and spend his little free time in obsessively reading about the history of the Bulgarian province Stara Zagora in the uneventful years

⁵⁸ Scheffler *Equality and Tradition*, 21.

between 1522-1543. According to the compound account, Sam *values* his new compulsion,⁵⁹ since he has already had the belief that Bulgarian history is valuable and is now also motivated to study it.⁶⁰ But it would be almost cruel to call this freak amalgam of a belief and compulsive desire *valuing*; for we value, as Scheffler writes, “things that matter to us, or that we prize or cherish, or that have a certain importance for us.”⁶¹

These kinds of absurd examples are a direct consequence of the reductive nature of the compound account. In organic holism they are avoided, since what we value is what constitutes an organic part of our life, rather than a (potentially) merely coincidental conjunction of mental states.

⁵⁹ Recall that Sam values Bulgarian History.

⁶⁰ A more complete example will also have to include the emotional dimension of valuing. Thus, for instance, as a result of the experimental operation meant to remove his compulsion, Sam now feels scorching sorrow if anything happens to documents that have to do with Stara Zagora in the uneventful years between 1522-1543.

⁶¹ Scheffler *Equality and Tradition*, p. 17.

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